

Branding

A systems theoretic perspective

Een wetenschappelijke proeve op het gebied van
de managementwetenschappen

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Preface

This book investigates how brands can provide a 'logical' connection between varieties of products. During this investigation I have learned a lot about the principles of categorization.

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CHAPTER I

Branding in the context of a symbolized world

"Corporations have become the sole arbiters of cultural ideas and taste in America. Our culture is corporate culture."

Tibor Kalman, 1998

1.1 Introduction

Organizations not only provide society with products and services, but with meanings and symbols as well. The capacity of producing relevant and attractive meanings or symbols has become an important topic in recent management literature. Many authors have discussed the contribution of such capacity to the success of organizations. Brands and branding play an important role in this organizational ability to produce and maintain these meanings and symbols. Brands are the embodiment of symbolic meanings and branding is a process by which such meanings and symbols are (re) produced.

Both brands and branding should be understood in the context of a society that has provided a breeding ground for organizations as producers of meaning. Although the organizational ability of creating meanings and symbols is discussed excessively by management literature, the treatment of this subject is not always grounded in a theory. One of the exceptions to this is the French sociologist Baudrillard who has produced thorough theoretic notions concerning the impact of commercial symbolization on society. As we will try to show in this chapter, his theory on consumption provides a useful context for the topic of branding.

Next to the fact that Baudrillard's notions provide a theoretic foundation for the context of branding they also contain the first step in understanding the phenomenon of branding in itself. The brand is considered by Baudrillard as one of the cornerstones in the process of consumption. Moreover, he touches another important aspect of branding: the necessi-

ty of brands to – on the one hand – ignore differences and treat a variety of things as being the same and – on the other hand – create differences. These – in some cases contradicting – demands put on brands between absorbing variety and creating distinctiveness at the same time, is one of issues we will address in this thesis as well.

Finally, Baudrillard's theoretic notions help to see branding as being more than 'just' an economic process of exchanging goods and services or 'only' a process of producing or consuming advertisements. We will see that branding, like consumption, can be considered as a symbolic language as well, 'consumed' and produced in a recursive process of persons and organizations exchanging goods and services.

This chapter will set the scene for this thesis. In section 1.2, we will describe the context in which branding flourishes. In section 1.3. branding and brands will be discussed by using some of the notions advanced by Baudrillard. Section 1.4, then, will treat the research agenda that provides a guideline for the rest of this thesis.

1.2 A symbolized world

In recent management literature, a vivid interest is displayed in the symbolic value of products and organizational activities. This has become visible for instance in the way products are marketed. Products have evolved from tools to media. They have become mechanisms carrying symbolic value. They no longer represent the final step in the buying process, but are a starting point in the process of communication. They satisfy needs for determining and confirming an identity. They have become spokesman for companies reflecting environmental concern, ideas about the world or the ambitions of a charismatic founder. And besides that, they have become means by which users can say something about themselves. Nike doesn't so much sell shoes but rather an image of what it would be like to be in those shoes. It sells a promise of an experience. "The image does not represent the product", but rather, "the product represents the image (Firat & Venkatesh: 1993)."

Products are not only just the output of a production process, or instruments that draw value from their instrumental use. For both the organization and the user, products have also become carriers of symbolic meanings. They are used by both as vehicles to tell something about themselves or about the other. As Rifkin (2000) argues: "As cultural pro-

duction comes to dominate the economy, goods increasingly take on the quality of props. They become mere platforms or settings around which elaborated cultural meanings are acted out. They lose their material importance and take on a symbolic importance. They become less objects and more tools to help facilitate the performance of lived experiences (2000: 173)."

Not only products are used as communicative vehicles. Due to various circumstances, communicative symbolic value is also attributed to things other than products. All we see, smell, hear and taste has to say something, should function as a symbol or as a statement of some kind. A mall used to be a place to buy goods or meet people. Today- especially in America – malls have become sophisticated communication media designed to (re-) produce ideas. Even nature is viewed as a giant theatre for potential performances. In the eyes of some writers, all the entire world has become a stage.

One of the backgrounds of this development can be found in the popularity of the notion that organizations create value by using the world as a setting for using or buying products and services. More specifically, it is argued by some representatives of modern management literature that economic value of products is extracted from their potential to provide a memorable experience: "After hundreds of years of converting physical resources into propertied goods, we are now increasingly transforming cultural resources into paid-for personal experiences and entertainments" (...) "Today, the entertainment economy, the economy of fantasy and play, of intense and pleasurable lived experiences, is an omnipresent force in the lives of a growing number of Americans whose interests are turning from industrial products and services to cultural production. Buying access to enjoyable and meaningful lived experiences, especially among the middle class around the world, has become a way of life (Rifkin, 2000: 137-163)."

In the view of some authors, economic traffic between organization and customer is characterized less and less by the mere production and exchange of products and services. Instead, organizations must be able to change aspects of the environment into communicative and symbolic phenomena in order to create such memorable experience. Products, malls, cities, nature are increasingly judged by and made subordinate to another, higher valued purpose: their ability to become a symbol and communicate. So, Pine & Gilmore (1999: 16) suggest that manufacturers, for instance, 'experientialize' their goods. Automakers, they argue,

should focus on enhancing the 'driving experience', furniture producers 'the sitting experience', appliance manufacturers the 'washing and cooking experience', apparel manufacturers the 'wearing experience'. Moreover, it is argued that value is created for organizations by offering memorable experiences which in themselves are a major source of creating economic value.

Among others¹ Gilmore & Pine (1999) have elaborated the value creating potential of experiences. They have argued that experiences are a previously unarticulated 'genre of economic output'². In order to make this happen, manufacturers must broaden their span of influence on the environment. In order to offer a 'sitting experience' furniture producers redecorate your house. Not only the furniture, but the house becomes a stage where everything communicates in favour of a particular experience. To contribute to the 'driving experience' car manufacturers not only focus on the car alone. Volkswagen has opened the 'Autostadt theme park' next to the VW plant in Wolfsburg, Germany. Manufacturers try to gain control over the way the product setting – the environment in which products and services are purchased or consumed – should be interpreted by others. One of the ways in which such control can be established is by embedding the purchase or consumption of products and services in a 'theme' (Pine & Gilmore, 1999: 48-50). Malls might choose thematic constructions like 'a walk down memory lane'. These themes should fit the character of the enterprise staging the event. Pine & Gilmore argue that a setting must be freed from 'negative cues' – referred to as 'meaningless and trivial messages' – and be rendered with indelible 'impressions': "Words are not enough, of course. To create the desired impressions, companies must introduce cues that together affirm the nature of the desired experience for the guest. Each cue must support the theme, and none should be inconsistent with it (1999: 53)."

But, not only do organizations create value via the communication of symbols, the staging of this world has become a booming business in itself: "An ever-growing segment of the American economy is now devoted to designing, building, and then dressing the sets in which we live, work, shop and play; to creating our costumes; to making our hair shine and our faces glow; to slandering our bodies, to supplying our props (Gabler: 1998, 8)."

So, judging from the notions brought forward in modern management and marketing literature, organizations must not only be able to produce goods and services, but to produce meanings as well. Moreover,

this production of symbolized meanings not only applies to products and services themselves, but also to the settings in which they are purchased and used. In consequence of the attempts by organizations to realize this, the world becomes more and more symbolized. This clearly is stimulated by the fact that this staging becomes a business in itself.

Although the representatives of modern management literature cited above in some cases exaggerate³ and although their notions are not totally new⁴, they do indicate an important development. They make clear that organizations have to make an appeal not only to their production or marketing abilities, but foremost to their ability to create and communicate symbols. As one of them argues: "What's the future of business and branding after the information age? It won't be the latest technology or newest product (in itself), but the story behind the product that will provide the competitive edge. The company with the best stories wins; consumers will pay for the story that sparks the imagination (Jenssen, 1999)."

To get a deeper insight in the organizational ability to create and communicate symbols, we need to know something about the society in which it is embedded. Baudrillard recognized early (1970) the power of symbols and communication in society and embedded this in a theory about contemporary society: "More and more basic aspects of our contemporary societies fall under a logic of significations, an analysis of codes and symbolic systems – though this does not make these societies primitive ones (1970/1989: 33)." His theory provides a deeper insight in the symbolic nature of society in general and in the backgrounds of the signifying function of objects in particular. This function is the cornerstone of a process he calls consumption – characterized as "a tribal myth", (which) has become the morality of our present world (1998: 35)."⁵

To understand the real impact of consumption one has to make a distinction between the individual function of objects (in the broadest sense of the word) used by people on the one hand and the social function of objects as signifiers on the other. As Baudrillard argues: "... outside the field of its objective function, where it is irreplaceable, outside the field of its denotation, the object becomes substitutable in a more or less unlimited way within the field of connotations, where it assumes sign value. Thus the washing machine serves as an appliance and acts as an element of prestige, comfort etc. It is strictly this latter field that is the field of consumption. All kinds of other objects may be substituted here for the washing machine as signifying element. In the logic of signs, as in that of symbols,

objects are no longer linked in any sense to a definite function or need. Precisely because they are responding here to something quite different, which is either the social logic or the logic of desire, for which they function as a shifting and unconscious field of signification (1998: 76,. 77).” According to Baudrillard, the individual consumption of objects in itself does not touch the heart of consumption. It is the contribution of this individual consumption of objects to the development and maintenance of some sign language and to placing the consumer into the domain of meaning, which makes consumption a powerful development even changing the foundations of the human being⁶: “Consumer behaviour, which is apparently focused on, and oriented towards, objects and enjoyment, in fact conduces to quite other goals: (...) that of production, through differential signs, of a social code of values. It is not, then, the individual function of interest across a corpus of objects which is determinant, but the immediate social function of exchange, of communication, of distribution of values across a corpus of signs (...) One enters into a generalized system of exchange and production of coded values where despite themselves, all consumers are involved with all others (1998: 70-78).”

Based on this interpretation of consumption, we can understand the need for organizations to create symbols – which is addressed by the modern authors described above – as being part of a larger context of ‘consumption’. ‘Consumption’ is the process that consists of on the one hand the actual circulation, purchase, sale and appropriation of differentiated goods and services and on the other hand of signs reflected by these goods and services constituting a language, “... a code by which the entire society communicates and converges (1998: 79-80).” The actual purchase and use of goods and services on the one hand and the (re)production of signs are mutually related. A *regulated* circulation of objects is created in which object circulation is nurtured by the (re) production of signs and vice versa. According to Baudrillard, the function of this is to constitute and preserve a system of communication. It is comparable with other social phenomena, like marriage rules or kinship systems.” It: “... may be regarded as a kind of language or, in other words, as a set of operations aimed at ensuring a certain type of communication between individuals and groups. It is the same with consumption here: there too, a bio-functional, bio-economic system of goods and products is supplanted by a sociological system of signs (the level of consumption proper) and the basic function of the regulated circulation of objects and goods is the

same as it is with women and words: ensuring a certain type of communication (199870: 79).” Consumption has a function in society to ensure a certain type of communication developed and maintained via the entangled relation between the (re)production of signs and the circulation of goods and services.

So, the fact that organizations are engaged in the creation of symbols should not only be interpreted from an economic point of view, as such is suggested by authors like Pine & Gilmore, arguing that it concerns a new way of economic value creation. Baudrillard teaches us that it can be perceived as being part of a social phenomenon called consumption. Consumption is not perceived as a goal of individual organizations, nor as an activity of individual customers. It is perceived as a phenomenon affecting society as a whole.

In this world in which “things” increasingly have a communicative and symbolic value, brands play an important role. They identify the speakers and symbolize what has to be told. As such, they are one of the building blocks of the symbolized world sketched above. More in particular, the process of branding is one of the organizing parts of the process of consumption as described by Baudrillard. In the next section, we will elaborate the similarities and differences.

1.3 The branding dilemma

Although Baudrillard’s theory is not about brands in particular, it reveals certain characteristics about the brand – related to its contribution to the process of consumption – that are relevant for our understanding of the brand.

The brand is recognized by him as an inflection point – a sign – into which all kinds of messages and signs converge. It comprises and captures a series of objects and signs and brings them back to one coherent and dominant sign: “... all these contents are merely juxtaposed signs, all of which culminate in the super-sign that is the brand name, which is the only real message (199870: 148).” The brand is viewed as a binding force: “The shop window, the advertisement, the manufacturer, and *the brand name*⁸, which here plays a crucial role, imposes a coherent, collective vision, as though they were an almost indissociable in dissociable totality, a series (199870: 27).” According to Baudrillard, the power of a brand, lies in the fact that it binds together various elements. As such the brand

name refers to a totality of different kinds of things, signs and meanings.

Baudrillard's definition of the brand relates very well to ours, which will be elaborated in the next chapter. In our view, the brand is a concept⁸ that is generalized and shared among organizations and customers and is signified by a variety of 'objects' or words. The fact that it is generalized means that it can be applied to different kinds of objects. At the same time, its generalized character enables it to be shared by different kinds of people. They can use it as a meaningful 'tool' for making choices. We saw in the previous section that Baudrillard's signs reflect 'a social code of values'. As we will see, brands as shared generalized concepts reflect preferences; ideas about which ideas or behaviour should be preferred in a particular situation.

The generalized character of brands as concepts constitutes one of its strengths: by being generalized they can bind a variety of objects and be applied by a variety of people for a variety of choices. However, at the same time, the generalization that is created by brands constitutes a risk. For it implies that they neglect 'differences' between different objects and people. Brands do not treat them as such, as what they are in their individuality. They are treated only by some imposed similarity. However, by binding objects into a brand, a new difference is created as well. A brand distinguishes the objects it binds together from other objects. The objects are 'branded' as being different from other objects. So, on the one hand, brands abolish 'real differences' and on the other hand, they create new ones. By managing brands, organizations neglect differences in order to create other ones.

Baudrillard's theory on consumption provides an interesting perspective on this particular characteristic of brands. According to this theory, corporations make a professional contribution to the maintenance of consumption as a sign language. This contribution is based on a combined process of what he calls homogenization and differentiation: "...it is industrial monopoly concentration, which, abolishing the real differences between human beings, homogenizing persons and products, simultaneously ushers in the reign of differentiation. Things are as much the same here as with religious or social movements; it is upon the ebbing of their original impulse that churches or institutions are built. Here, too, it is upon the loss of differences that the cult of difference is founded" (1998: 70-89)."

Following Baudrillard, we could say that organizations produce signi-

fications like brands that are “ebbing of their original impulse”. As symbolic entities, they homogenize and cannot fully capture the individuality of an organization or the differences between specific objects, persons and situations. Instead, they create a symbolic signification that is abstracted from their originality. At the same time, there is a need to create a specific identity or highlight the differences from competitors. This principle underlying the building of brands – generalizing from individual differences and the need to build a specific identity at the same time – reveals a dilemma for organizations dealing with branding. This dilemma has become more compelling because the pressure on ‘both sides’ (generalization and difference) has increased.

On the one hand, brands nowadays need to adopt different roles and have the flexibility to change a stand, whenever the organization thinks the market is forcing it. One of the most visible ways of this, is by allowing more (different kinds of) products under its name. In yet another respect, brands face the demand to be open to variety. Under the influence of new media offering more personalized communication and distribution channels, like the internet, brands will be offering more and more choice to customers even as far as allowing them to contribute to the designing of products. Dell was one of the first brands to offer people the opportunity to customize their own computer. It is now possible to design your own soft drink, golf clubs or clothing. Brands that are offering this opportunity leave space for variety. They make use of their ability to generalize and provide a framework for binding that variety.

On the other hand however, it is important for brands to create a difference from other brands and grasp and determine the identity of the brander. With respect to the latter aspect, the brand should make the brander recognizable, and therefore stay as close to its specific unique – and most stable – characteristics. Both in order to establish a difference and to display the specific character – the essence – of the brander, brands need to reflect some sort of originality. As we will discuss in this thesis, the need for generalization (allowing variety) and creating a difference (creating specificity) can be contradictory in some cases: what makes a Dell computer a Dell computer (what is the specific identity of Dell) if everybody develops its own customized variant (the variety of objects grasped by the brand is enormous)?

This dilemma between generalization and difference, or in other words between variety and specificity, is fundamental for brands as well as for organizations. In a more general sense, some authors have argued

that success of organizations depends on their ability to stay true to a certain sense of identity and at the same time pursue new routes for innovation. As Collins & Porras argue: "Core ideology in a visionary company works hand in hand with a relentless drive for progress that implies change and forward movement in all that is not part of the core ideology (1995: 82) ... a visionary company does not seek mere balance between core and progress; it seeks to be both highly ideological and highly progressive at the same time (1995: 85)." So, according to these authors⁹, organizations in general must be able to combine a strong sense of identity with a drive to create variety or innovation.

The dilemma companies are facing, between building an identity and exploring new routes also applies to people. As we will discuss in greater depth in the next chapter, the sociologist Bauman (1995) has argued that it is a problem of modern man in general. On the one hand, modern times require that people are very flexible in all kinds of respects¹⁰. That means people are scared to predetermine their lives in some way or another. They are afraid to exclude the possibility of having new experiences. On the other hand, people feel the need to gain recognition and build up a stable identity at the same time. Modern man is captured between the contradicting demands of being 'someone' and being 'among everyone'.

So, the dilemma between variety and specificity not only applies to brands. In different forms (innovation and recognition, adaptability and identity, mobility and recognition of identity), it is seen by various authors as a dilemma for both organizations and individuals. Branding can be an appropriate tool for organizations as well as customers to deal with this dilemma. Branding is a process by which the operations of an organization or network of organizations (brander) can be geared to the operations of customers (brand users) and vice versa. In a perfectly working process of branding, the operations of the brander and brand user are regulated in such a way that they become mutually related to each other. As we will discuss in the next chapter, branding essentially is a function that can be used by the brander to deal with its own dilemma of variety (ignoring difference) and specificity (creating difference) and to deal with this dilemma of brand users at the same time. The brand concept that is shared by both plays an important role in achieving this. For the brand can function as a mutual reference point for both, providing a mutually shared sense of identity and space for diversity.

The fact that a brand can function as a point of reference for both the brander and the brand user can make it a useful strategic tool for organi-

zations. In theory, the brand is not 'just' a way of adding communicative value to a product or service. It can be used as a framework for particular strategic decisions of an organization, such as what kind of businesses to pursue or product development decisions to make¹¹. It can adopt such a function because in theory it can represent a point of reference that is shared by brander and brand user.

Branding can gear the decision making process of the brander to that of the brand user and vice versa. More in particular, it is a way of closely linking the strategic (marketing) decisions of organizations to the decision making processes of their customers. In this thesis we will describe branding as a process that affects both the operations of organizations and customers. Our study of the phenomenon will not only focus on the individual use of brands by a customer or an organization. Instead, we will build a general theory on branding that conceives branding as involving both a brander's and brand user's perspective.

We consider the process of branding as developing similarly to the way consumption is established and preserved in society. In Baudrillard's view, consumption, on the one hand works via signs and on the other hand it relies on the reproduction of these signs via the circulation of goods and services. The same distinction is important for understanding the process of branding. The brand as a generalized concept is a sign. By considering the brand as a concept, it will be able to study the meaning connected to this sign. At the same time, the brand is a system of interaction between the brander and brand user, which results in an exchange of goods, services and information. This system of interaction contains the communicative side of branding, which we will call the branding system. In our view of branding, meaning (the brand concept) and communication (the branding system) are not separate entities. They are inextricably bound up with each other. The concept of the brand – and with that, its specific identity – is determined, affirmed or rejected in interaction (or better communications) between the brander and brand user and between brand users. As Baudrillard's buying of goods is an act of contributing to the language of consumption, buying a product of a brand can be an act of contributing to the maintenance or development of a specific brand concept. It is via communication that the brand concept is established. Conversely, the brand is a vehicle by which the actions of the brander are oriented to the actions of the brand user and vice versa. It is through mediation of the brand concept that particular communicative actions are performed and a branding system is produced. The adoption

of a shared brand concept can influence the inclination of the brand user to buy goods and services of a particular brand and can motivate the brander to produce these goods and services according to the standards reflected by the brand concept. If a shared brand concept is used for decision making by both the brander and the brand user, the actions of both will become related to each other.

So, without the branding system there cannot be a brand and without the brand the branding system could not exist either. A theory on branding must explain how such a system is constituted, describe its constituent elements as well as the means of reproduction of these elements. A theory is needed that provides insight in the way actions become 'connected' and 'enclosed' and stabilized as coherences.

In this section, we have seen that Baudrillard's theory on consumption provides ideas that can be useful for analysing branding. In the first place, his notion of the brand refers to its generalizing and at the same time differentiating ability. That means its ability to identify, group together a variety of objects and persons and differentiate these from others at the same time. Secondly, his treatment of consumption and the role of organizations in that process have yielded a fruitful insight in a dilemma of modern organizations and individuals branding is dealing with. This refers to the dilemma of variety (being generalized and neglect differences) and specificity (creating a difference and grasping a specific identity). Thirdly, his theory on consumption provides a first rough insight in branding as a process. Like consumption, branding is seen as a process of two mutually related elements: the brand concept, representing meaning and the branding system representing communication. In this thesis we will describe both the brand and the branding system and explore the relation between these in greater depth. As we will indicate in the next paragraph, specific branches of system theory and cognitive psychology can be helpful in providing these insights.

1.4 The elements of the thesis

In the previous paragraphs, we have argued that branding can be understood against the background of a symbolized world. More in particular, branding provides an answer to a dilemma both organizations and individuals deal with: the dilemma of variety and specificity. At the same

time, branding is a reflection of that dilemma: brands must have the ability to absorb variety and stay specific at the same time. These issues will all be treated in this thesis. The research agenda for doing so concerns three elements:

- 1 The construction of a general theory on branding
- 2 The design of methods which can be used to investigate the dilemma between being specific recognition and producing variety
- 3 The study of concrete brands that face this dilemma

We will briefly discuss these three elements and provide a roadmap for this thesis.

Ad 1 A general theory on branding

As far as we know, there is no coherent theory on branding and brands embracing all the phenomena we described above. Such a theory has to include both the operations of brander and brand user as well as the brand as a phenomenon influencing these operations. It must pay attention to the environment in which branding takes place. It also should relate the situation of the brander and the brand user to each other and at the same time be able to specify the role of these separately. Finally, such a theory has to make it possible to consider branding as a strategic tool of organizations. In this thesis, we will develop the backbone of such a theory.

Our general theory on branding starts with the observation that branding as a process is based on the mutual connection between concept on the one hand and communication on the other. To understand branding as a process we must make use of a theory that combines these two elements into one coherent theory. Especially the modern systems theory of the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann, provides a useful foundation for our theory.

First of all, Luhmann's theory provides notions needed to grasp the essentials of the branding system as a communicative system. His theory on social systems describes that (social) systems are reproduced and developed by communicative actions (communications) that mutually relate to each other. Communicative actions are the constituting parts of these social systems. A branding system can be understood as a specific kind of social system. Following Luhmann's theory, we will argue that a branding system can be understood as a specific kind of social system.

Branding systems develop as autopoietic (self reproducing) systems of mutually related communicative actions¹². Next to Luhmann's theory on social systems we will also make use of the cybernetic branch of systems theory. Especially the work of Ashby on regulation is used to understand how communicative actions are regulated in such way that a branding system can develop and a brand concept is (re)produced.

Secondly, Luhmann's theory provides a background to understand the role of the brand in the operations of the brander. In line with Luhmann's theory, the brand is understood as a self description of an organization that plays a role in guiding the communicative operations¹³. In the process of communication, 'something' is marked out. A (self) description – like a brand – is crucial in this process of 'marking'. As we will discuss, in our definition, the brand is a concept; a notion by which both brander and brand user are able to understand (an aspect of) the world. *Last but not least*, Luhmann's theory also helps to understand the way in which the two sides of branding discussed in the previous paragraph – concept and communication – are related. The branding system refers to the actual communicative actions of the brander and brand user, the brand refers to the concept (or description) that represents the meaning of the brand. The brand is not merely a concept in its own right, it is created by, via and for the branding system, the recursively related communicative actions of brander and brand users. If branding works well, the communicative actions by the brander and brand user are differentiated from other actions based on the marking made by the brand. Thus, a pattern of differentiated communications can develop and establish itself, called the branding system. In that way, the communicative actions contribute to the establishment and development of the brand and the brand contributes to the establishment and development of the branding system.

The cybernetic branch of systems theory, as represented by Ashby, will be used for understanding the branding system as a system that regulates itself via the communicative actions of the brander and brand user. It will also be applied to investigate the specific contribution of the brander to the branding system. The brander can make a contribution to the branding system by regulating its own operations in a particular way. Ashby's notions concerning regulation and stability are applied to understand the contribution of the brander to the branding system as a form of regulation, as a way of keeping the operations of the brander between certain prespecified limits. Based on these insights it will be possi-

ble for instance to identify the regulating options of a brander and to define the criteria a brander must apply in order to make a contribution to the branding system¹⁴.

So, the proposed general theory on branding will define branding in terms of a communicative system, conceive the brand as a concept, and it will provide cybernetic tools to gain insight in the way the brander can make a contribution to the branding system.

Ad 2 Methods to investigate the branding dilemma

The indicated ideas from modern systems theory and cybernetics provide a theoretical foundation for a method. This method is needed to investigate the indicated dilemma (page 21) of the brander to ensure specificity and variety at the same time. The method concerns the analysis of the brand concept and will focus on providing tools for the analysis of the regulating actions used by the brander.

As discussed above, brands as concepts are inflection points in which a variety of objects and persons converge into one sign. The pressure on the brand to 'absorb variety' together with its need to stay specific, have made us focus on the boundaries of the brand as a concept. If brands are able to 'unite' a variety of objects, what are the underlying – connecting – principles that make this possible? At face value, hamburgers and toys have nothing in common. The brand McDonalds somehow binds these objects together in a very logical way. It is the logic behind that logic that interests us. For it is that logic that determines the actual variety of objects a brand can group together. At the same time, if people would not conceive these objects as a logical combination offered by the brand, such absorption of variety might threaten the specificity of the brand.

For the design of methods to investigate the brand as a concept, we will use the work of Lakoff. This American cognitive psychologist has build up a theory on concepts. The title of his book "Women, fire and dangerous things" (1987) refers to the way concepts are capable of 'imposing' some sort of logic to 'things'. For instance, if we were to be confronted with the words 'women, fire and dangerous things', we would probably conclude that women are fiery and dangerous. However, the chain of inference applied in that case is based on a common idea that 'things' are categorized together on the basis of what they have in common. Lakoff argues that 'common properties' is just one of the many principles we apply in 'grouping things together'.

To understand these principles, he indicates the relation between cate-

gories and concepts. In this theory, concepts are considered as providing – what we will call – rules for categorization that prescribe the boundaries of a category. The insight in the boundaries of a category, as laid down by the corresponding concept, provides insight in the variety of ‘things’ possibly bound together by that category. Following Lakoff, it is presumed that the structure of a concept determines the ability for categorization that is given on the basis of a concept. In case of the words ‘women, fire and dangerous things’, it turns out that these words also belong together on the basis of a totally different ‘logic’ than common properties alone. They are all grouped together by a concept used in the Australian aboriginal language Dyirbal. This concept *balan* defines a category that includes women, fire and dangerous things. It also includes birds that are not dangerous, as well as exceptional animals, such as platypus, bandicoot and echidna. To understand this complex categorization, insight is needed into the structure of the concept of *balan*. Accordingly, to understand McDonalds’ way of categorizing hamburgers and toys, the structure of its concepts must be made subject of investigation.

Lakoff has designed building blocks for the analysis of the structure of a concept. His theory is used for and translated into a method for the investigation of the structure of a brand concept. By doing so, insight is given in the categorization rules provided by that brand concept, explaining and describing the degree of variety allowed by that concept as well as the ability of it to stay specific and recognisable. By doing this, we will be using a different method than most other scientific research in this field. This kind of research – we will call this ‘extension research’ – can be considered as studying the same dilemma of variety and specificity. It is based on studying the impact of the attachment of new products to the brand. However, as most theories on branding¹⁵, it has paid little attention to the brand as a symbolized concept but considers the brand as a part of a category of products. We can say they belong to a pre-symbolic stage of understanding branding.

In yet another respect our methods are different, because it will be used to analyze the brander’s use of the brand. The brander’s concept of the brand will be studied as a tool to regulate his operations. We assume that the eventual variety of products and services that is introduced by the brander will depend on the boundaries laid down by the concept of the brand he applies. Most extension research focuses on the consumer and tries to find explanations for the boundaries of the brand (to what extent can the brand be stretched into more different product categories?)

by investigating the consumer's acceptance of certain products under a brand name. In contrast, our approach is based on the assumption that explanations for the ability of brands to produce variety (and stay specific at the same time) can also be found by studying the boundaries of the brander's concept of the brand.

Besides the analysis of the brander's concept of the brand, the scope of the methods used here will include the possibility of analysing the regulating options of the brander. This can help to gain insight in the strategies by branders to restore 'flaws' in the conceptual structure of the brand. At the same time, it can provide an explanation for the current conceptual structure as it is analyzed with the help of the first part of the method. As we described above, the analysis of the regulating options is based on cybernetics.

Ad 3 An investigation of concrete brands

This thesis not only lays down a theory, but consists of empirical research and practical insights as well. The last part of it contains the investigation of concrete brands. We have investigated three cases of brands that are confronted with the dilemma of variety and specificity. This empirical enquiry serves four goals.

First of all, the empirical investigation serves to confirm the theoretical notions displayed in the previous paragraphs. It addresses questions such as:

- Are these theoretical notions applicable to a situation of concrete brands?
- Is it possible to consider the brand as a concept?
- Is it possible to divide such a concept into smaller subconcepts and is it possible to find the different structures, just as we hypothesized?
- Can the process of branding be understood in terms of regulation?

Secondly, we expect this investigation to affirm that the proposed method is useful for gaining deeper insight in the branding dilemma as discussed.

Thirdly, the empirical enquiry is conducted to gain empirical insight in the existence of and solutions to the branding dilemma itself. We will investigate whether the dilemma discussed above is perceived as a dilemma among branders. We will study the differences between brands concerning their conceptual structure and strategies for regulation and in-

investigate what that means for the potential of these brands to produce variety or maintain specificity.

Fourthly, an empirical investigation is performed to investigate whether the use of the method can shed a light on the individual problems/dilemmas of the separate brands. We will investigate whether the diagnosis made with the help of the indicated methods can be supportive for individual branders in dealing with the dilemma.

In other words, our goal is to conduct an empirical enquiry in order to:

- Test the theoretical notions
- Test ‘the methods’ as a way of gaining insight in the branding dilemma
- Gain a deeper insight in possible explanations concerning the branding dilemma in general
- Test ‘the methods’ as a diagnosis model for investigating the branding dilemma in the case of individual brands

Knowing its elements, we end with a rough roadmap for the rest of the thesis. We will start in chapter 2 with presenting a general theoretical framework on branding and brands. Within that chapter, the branding dilemma will be discussed from a systems theoretical perspective. In chapter 3, we will investigate the foundations of the method for analyzing that dilemma by discussing the notions of ‘categorization’ and ‘concepts’. In chapter 4, these insights will be used to develop one part of a method that can be used for the investigation of the branding dilemma: the tools to analyze the conceptual structure of the brand. In chapter 5, we will discuss the overall method for analyzing the branding dilemma. Chapter 6 will contain the actual empirical enquiry. In chapter 7 finally, some conclusions will be formulated.

CHAPTER 2

Branding as regulation of interaction

"The danger of the large number is repetition: each additional store reduces aura and contributes to a sense of familiarity. The danger of a larger scale is the Flagship syndrome: a megalomaniac accumulation of the obvious that eliminates the last elements of surprise and mystery that cling to the brand, imprisoning it in a 'definitive' identity."

Koolhaas, 2002

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we will develop a general theoretical framework that can provide a coherent description and definition of branding. This framework will deal with fundamental issues concerning branding, like 'the nature of branding', 'the reasons behind its popularity', 'the difference between a brand and branding', 'the necessary conditions for the existence of branding' and 'dilemmas in branding'. This theoretical framework is based on systems theory and cybernetics.

In the first part of the theory we will argue that branding can play a crucial role in building and preserving the interaction between an organization¹⁶ and its customers. The operations of both do not have a natural tendency to be oriented towards each other. Branding is a form of regulation that regulates the operations of the brander and brand user in such way that they become mutually linked as communicative actions. In creating and maintaining a chain of mutually oriented (communicative) operations lies the function of branding. Once branding becomes successful, it creates a system produced by communicative actions of both the brander and brand user. This will be called the *branding system*. The brand plays a crucial role in the creation, preservation and development of the branding system. Where branding is the system of mutually con-

nected operations, the *brand* provides the orientation the brander and brand user can relate their operations to.

The second part of the theory focuses on the brander's contribution to the branding system. For the branding system to survive, the brander has to regulate its operations in such a way that they make a contribution to that system. The function which ensures that such a contribution is made, we will call the brand regulator. We will discuss and investigate when the operations of the brander contribute positively to the branding system and when they threaten the existence of the branding system.

In section 2.2., the function of branding will be discussed. We will argue that the function of branding is to solve a specific 'problem of choosing' which both brander and brand user are confronted with. We will call this problem the 'contingency problem'.

In the next three sections, the first part of the theoretical framework will be described, which concerns the nature of branding and its major principles. Section 2.3. describes the nature of the branding system. In section 2.4. the regulation of the branding system is analyzed by using system theory and cybernetics. In section 2.5 a closer look is given on the nature of the brand. In section 2.6. we will continue to investigate the issue of contingency, which started in section 2.2.. With the help of the theoretical notions of the previous sections, it will be explained how branding can help to deal with contingency.

The last two sections deal with the second part of the theoretical framework: the contribution of the brander to the branding system. Section 2.7. describes the notion of brand regulation by giving a general cybernetic analysis of the brander's contribution to the branding system. In section 2.8. we will discuss a specific dilemma the brander encounters in this process of regulating the brander system: the variety-specificity dilemma. At the end of this section, the theoretical description of this dilemma is translated into concrete research questions.

2.2 Contingency and the function of branding

2.2.1 Introduction

One of the issues we raised in the introduction of this chapter is concerned with the popularity of branding. Although it has become popular recently, especially at the end of the previous century, branding can provide an answer to a phenomenon very basic to humans, organizations and societies. It is related to the problematic character of making choices. Although we will argue that ‘making choices’ has become more difficult for organizations as well as for their customers recently, it is problematic by nature.

The first step to understand branding, is to understand the problematic character of choosing. In this section, modern system theory will be explored to gain some insight in this general problematic character of choice making (paragraph 2.2.2.). The second step will contain the potential role of branding in solving that problem (paragraph 2.2.3.).

2.2.2 Contingency

The idea of ‘making choices’ is central to modern systems theory. This theory presupposes that the constitution of a system is related to the fact that selections are being made. One of the main representatives of modern systems theory, the sociologist Luhmann, more or less starts his theory on social systems with the idea that the constitution of social systems is based on the reduction of complexity, as caused by the selections that can be made by the system itself (Luhmann, 1984: 35). The boundaries between a system and the environment, between inside and outside, are produced by the selections of the system itself. Stated differently, it is the system that creates its own boundaries by making choices about what belongs to that system and what does not. Thus, a difference in complexity appears and is maintained. Through the selections made by the system, it creates and maintains a less complex status compared to the outside world. By doing so, some sort of order is created. Outside this order, there is more complexity than inside. Thus, a situation is created where the environment is always more complex than the system. As Luhmann indicates: ‘Systembildung erfolgt durch stabilisierung einer Grenze zwischen System und Umwelt, innerhalb derer eine höherwertige Ordnung mit weniger Möglichkeiten (also mit reduziertes Komplexität) invariant gehalten werden kann (1984: 11).”

In other words, systems constitute and maintain their unity by restricting their own possibilities. By doing so, they create a boundary between inside (less complexity) and outside (more complexity). Their constitution and maintenance is based on keeping this 'order'.

A system's environment always contains more 'possibilities' than it can handle. To the system, complexity of the environment means 'possible systems conditions' – and therefore system states – it can select from. This makes it necessary for systems to select. That's why Willke (1993) argues that complexity should be seen as internal complexity, which refers to: "...den Grad der Vielschichtigkeit, Vernetzung und Folgebelastigkeit eines Entscheidungsfeldes. In lebende Systemen ist Komplexität immer organisierte Komplexität (-), d.h. spezifische Zwänge der ganzheitlichen Organisation des Systems erzwingen 'unwahrscheinliche Zustände' der Selektion und Kombination von möglichen Ereignissen (1993: 280)." Complexity means a selection problem that is motivated by the environment. As Willke argues: 'Komplexität charakterisiert ein Entscheidungsfeld, in dem ein bestimmtes System auf die Anforderungen seiner Umwelt(en) reagieren muss. Komplexität bezieht sich also immer auf eine System-Umwelt-Relation, in welcher der Beziehungs- und Möglichkeitsreichtum der Umwelt dem System zum Problem wird (1993: 31)."

So, in modern systems theory, the constitution of a system is based on the fact that a system, facing its environment, is forced to make selections from its own range of possible operations, thereby constituting its own boundaries. This 'selection making' is potentially problematic, especially for systems like humans, organizations or societies, which are called non-trivial systems. Unlike trivial systems, non-trivial systems do not simply react to environmental conditions in a predetermined way; they act as independent systems. As Willke argues: "Ausgangspunkt ist die Situation eines instinktgesteuerten Tiers. Umweltereignisse sind nur in insoweit relevant, als unter ihnen bestimmte Schlüsselreize vorkommen, die bestimmte, festgelegte Reaktionen herforrufen. Die Beziehung Tier-Umwelt ist einseitig determiniert; der Reaktionsspielraum des Tieres ist weitgehend festgelegt und gerade nicht offen, nicht variabel, nicht im Einzelfall entscheidbar: also gerade nicht kontingent. Grundsätzlich anders ist die Lage bei sozialen Beziehungen zwischen Menschen. Menschen haben im Prinzip die Möglichkeit, unvorhergesehen, überraschend, variabel, offen, also kontingent zu handeln und ebenso kontingent zu reagieren (Willke, 1994: 28)."

Non-trivial systems can behave unpredictably and unexpectedly. Complex (non-trivial) systems not only reduce complexity stemming from the environment (the range of possible disturbances which appear to the system as stemming from the environment). Foremost, they have the ability to (re)produce internal complexity. Willke: "Das, was man beim Menschen etwa Kreativität, Phantasie oder einfach Denken oder geistige Produktivität nennt, ist nichts anderes als die Produktion neuer Komplexität. Auf der Ebene Soziale Systeme äußert sich diese Fähigkeit etwa im Aufbau differenzierter Produktionstechniken, in der Verwendung symbolisch gefasster Kommunikationsmedien jenseits der Sprache oder in der Institutionalisierung von wissenschaftlichen Prozessen (1993: 40)". Stated differently, human creativity is unlimited. Because of that ability, human systems can become aware of the fact that each choice that is made, can always be made otherwise. Where trivial systems simply select, human systems select against the background of a huge potential of alternative possibilities¹⁷. This fact, which is crucial for human systems, is called *contingency*: "Der Begriff bezeichnet mithin Gegebenes (Erfahrenes, Erwartetes, Gedachtes, Phantasiertes) im Hinblick auf mögliches Andersein, er bezeichnet Gegenstände im Horizont mögliche Abwandlungen (Luhmann, 1984: 152)."

Human and social systems (organizations, families, societies), create a boundary between themselves and the environment – and by doing so create a less complex status compared to that of the outside world – by making choices against the background of possible alternatives. In the constitution of the system, they are forced to choose and to be aware of choosing. This necessity of choosing and fundamental awareness of the existence of alternatives, is called contingency.

Contingency can be problematic, because it implies risk. As Luhmann indicates, social systems and humans share a basic awareness of the fact that every choice could be made otherwise and can be made wrongly. As Luhmann argues: "Komplexität in dem angegebenen Sinne heisst Selektionszwang, Selektionszwang heisst Kontingenz, und Kontingenz heisst Risiko. Jeder komplexer Sachverhalt beruht auf einer Selektion der Relationen zwischen seinen Elementen, die er benutzt um sich zu konstituieren und zu erhalten. Die Selektion placiert und qualifiziert die Elemente, obwohl für diese andere Relationierungen möglich wären. Dieses 'auch anders möglich sein' bezeichnen wir mit dem traditionsreichen Terminus Kontingenz. Er gibt zugleich den Hinweis auf die Möglichkeit des Verfehlens der günstigen Formung (1984: 47)."

So, in modern social systems theory, the idea of making choices is central. For its constitution, human and social systems, are forced to make choices – or selections. An awareness of ‘the necessity to choose’ goes hand in hand with a fundamental awareness of alternatives (the idea that each choice could be made otherwise). This is called contingency. As we will argue in the next paragraph, contingency is crucial to understand the relevance of branding.

2.2.3 *Branding as an answer to the contingency problem*

In the last decades, organizations and their customers have become more and more conscious of contingency. This has happened because traditional impediments for producing complexity have decreased for both of them. At the same time, the need to choose has not decreased at all. The combination of these two factors makes contingency a problem for both organizations and customers. That is where branding comes in as a potentially effective instrument to deal with this problem.

In the introductory chapter of this thesis, we argued that a central problem for organizations is the dilemma between variety and specificity; between leaving open a variety of possibilities and stay specific at the same time. These two sides of the coin represent two perspectives on strategy that have been influential in the last ten years of the previous century (van der Vorst, 1995). They reflect two potentially opposite demands put on organizations and thereby a potential source for a problematic process of choice making.

According to *one part of management literature*, absence of commitments has become a major source of competitive advantage for organizations. Focus on disorder and destructuring have replaced the emphasis on order and structure: “The prevailing management paradigm (of the 50s and 60s) was that of *structure*, and in a stable environment it indeed makes sense to search for the most effective structure to guide action (Evans & Doz, 1993: 94)”. Nonaka has also pointed out that the essence of scientific management was to “...pattern the workers behaviour within the production process (1988: 57).” In his opinion, classical contingency theory as well as strategic management theory share an orientation towards the creation of order and stability (Nonaka, 1988: 57). In contrast with these models, Nonaka and others have indicated the relevance of the spontaneous creation of order and the existence of chaos: “... chaos

widens the spectrum of options and forces the organization to seek new points of view. For an organization to renew itself, it must keep itself in a non-equilibrium state at all times (Nonaka, 1988: 59)." With respect to strategy, this dictates that strategic options must be left open as much as possible. As Weick has put it: "There are plenty of examples in industry where vague plan and projects provide an excuse for people to act, learn and create meaning (Weick, 1987: 224)." Nonaka, Weick and also Peters (1992, 1993) have indicated the necessity for organizations to produce many options for themselves. Building structures, increasing formalisation and standardisation block this capacity. They impose restrictions on the stimulation of organizational creativity and, hence, must be avoided as much as possible.

At the same time, *other parts of management literature* argue that commitment to a certain direction is the recipe for organizational success. The more turbulent the times, the more important it becomes to set the agenda as organization. Influential representatives of such a view of strategy are Prahalad & Hamel. Their concept of 'core competence' has become popular in management literature in the nineties of the previous century. In short, their concept explains that organizations have to restrict themselves to areas where they are good at or want to be good at. A well defined core competence provides a pattern that guides (new) organizational activities: "Competencies are the glue that bind existing businesses. They are also the engine for new business development (Prahalad & Hamel, 1990: 82)." Their approach implies not so much that organizations should create openness to as many possibilities as possible. Instead, it stresses the need to be committed¹⁸.

These recipes for organizational success in themselves put two demands on organizations. On the one hand, organizations are forced to leave many possibilities open in order to stay flexible. On the other hand, organizations should stick to certain principles. Organizations must 'stay open' and committed at the same time. As Ghemawat & Sol have argued: "Companies must frequently choose between commitment to competing in a particular way and the flexibility to compete effectively in a variety of ways. Strategists display a substantial amount of dissonance in this regard. Some assert that commitment to a particular strategic thrust is the prerequisite to sustained superior performance in most competitive situations. Others argue that the flexibility to change track at relatively short notice and at low cost -in order to adapt to or to take advantage of uncertainty- may be the key to success in these turbulent times (1998: 26)."

As this literature indicates, contingency has become a problem for organisations. Both the awareness of a necessity to choose (stay committed) and the awareness of alternatives (the need to create opportunities) are stimulated at the same time.

Increasingly, contingency has become a problem for customers as well. Traditional mechanisms helping to deal with contingency (like religion, morality, norms, roles) have lost their influence or are being used with less rigor. Traditional selecting mechanisms have lost their influence, which can be perceived as an increase in freedom. Moreover, people are less inclined to commitment, as this is asserted by the Polish sociologist Bauman: "However, people are terrified to commit themselves for the rest of their lives. It is the fear to be completely settled when you are twenty, cut off from all possible changes and opportunities. It is, for instance, the fear to be stuck in the same boring job, the fear that nothing will happen and everything will go in a predictable way (Bauman, 1995: 64)."

At the same time, the need to commit to a certain identity has not diminished at all. On the one hand, people want to stay flexible, on the other they feel the urge to commit. As Bauman argues: "So the new problem is: how can I reconcile these two contradictory ambitions – the desire for certainty and social recognition of my identity on the one hand and the desire for mobility, further development on the other. Or in other words: how can I be 'identical' and at the same time be open to new developments and adventures and, for new identities? The fear to 'fixate', fixophobia is, therefore, diametrically opposed to the 'fear for formlessness', protheophobia (Bauman, 1995: 64)."¹⁹

So, like organizations, there are signs that indicate that individuals are confronted with a growing problem of contingency. Both the awareness of a necessity to choose (needed for creating an identity) and the awareness of alternatives (the desire for mobility and development) are stimulated at the same time.

Both organizations and individuals are facing the contingency problem. Moreover, the contingency problem of individuals can be a problem for organizations as well. From an organizational perspective, the increased contingency of customers (or employees) has reduced certainties about what is expected of them. Increase in contingency in this respect makes it more difficult for organizations to build up a stable relation with them.

So, organizations have to deal with contingency in two variants: with their own contingency and with the contingency of their customers. Branding provides an answer to this double organizational problem. It aims at helping organizations to deal with their own contingency and at helping customers to deal with theirs at the same time.

Thus, branding can be a helpful instrument for organizations in two ways. First of all, because it can function as an instrument for making choices. A brand can define boundaries for organizational decisions, which makes it easier for organizations to deal with contingency. Secondly, it helps organizations to deal with the insecurity caused by the contingency of customers. It does so because if branding is successful, it relates the 'choice-making process' of organizations to the 'choice-making process' of customers. The problem of contingency is solved for both parties by relating the selection of action alternatives of the one to the selection of action alternatives of the other. At best, it means the mutual coupling of the decision making process of the organization to the 'choice-making process' of customers. As such, the insecurity of organizations caused by the contingency of customers can be solved.

Generally, the source of relevance for branding can be related to the increased problem of contingency felt by organisations and customers. In this view on branding – by which we deviate from a more popular understanding of branding – brands do not so much embody choices themselves – a car, a candy bar – but are considered as instruments for making choices that are shared by an organization and customer. In this view, the brand is not so much part of the problem of contingency – yet another alternative in the range of possibilities –. In essence, it should provide the solution: its function is to reduce the problematic character of making choices.

Before we will further specify how branding can solve this contingency problem, we will first describe the nature of the result of branding: the mutually related operations of an organization and its customers, called the branding system. Once we have described the working of this process, we will return to the problem of contingency in section 2.6.

2.3 The branding system as social system

2.3.1 Introduction

The function of branding is that it can solve the contingency problem of organizations (and customers²⁰) by gearing the operations of one organization and a group of customers to each other. It tunes the operations of that organization to those of its customers and vice versa. By doing so, it can influence the operations of both in such way that they become mutually related. In essence, branding refers to a 'system' of mutually related operations of an organization and its customers²¹. 'Branding' essentially is a system build up from those operations of the organization and those operations of a group of customers that are somehow connected to each other. For the sake of clarity, we will call the organization *brander* or *brander system* and this group of customers will be referred to as the *brand user*:

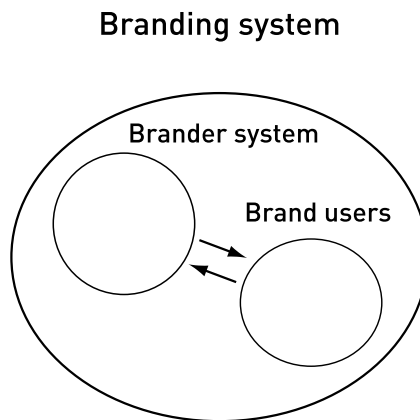


Figure 2.1 The branding system

Our understanding of branding as a system is based on the following two basic theoretical premises. In the first place, in our theoretical approach only operations can be part of the branding system. Neither a logo, a product, a building nor people can be part of a branding system. Instead, the communicative actions of the brander and brand user constitute the branding system. Secondly, the branding system is a system of communicative actions that reproduces itself. It is self-organizing or self-repro-

ducing. Neither the brander nor the brand user has 'control' over the way it develops. It is reproduced by the mutual coupling of the brander's and brand user's communicative actions.

The next paragraph deals with the self-organizing and self-reproducing character of social systems. Following Maturana (1981) and Maturana and Varela (1980, 1988), we will call this autopoiesis. In paragraph 2.3.3., we will discuss the basis elements of the branding system as a social system, i.e. communication. In the last paragraph of this section we will describe how the linking of these communications can create an order in itself, which we call the branding system.

2.3.2 *Social systems as autopoietic systems*

We understand the branding system as a system that develops by reproduction of its own elements. The main elements of the branding system are communications. The branding system reproduces itself by reproducing communications.

In systems theory, this principle of self reproduction is called autopoiesis. The notion of autopoiesis, which was first used by Maturana & Varela (1980), embodies a vision on the constitution of systems. Maturana considers autopoietic systems as systems: "...that are defined as unities, as networks of productions of components, that recursively, through interactions, generate and realize the network that produces them and constitute, in the space in which they exist, the boundaries of the network as components that participate in the realization of the network (Maturana, 1981: 21)." Based on this system theory of Maturana & Varela, Luhmann has developed his sociological theory on social systems. According to Luhmann, the constitution of social systems can be understood by the same principle of autopoieses. A transfer of the notion of autopoiesis to social systems leads to understanding these systems as self referential systems that constitute and maintain themselves via recursive production of their own elements. These basic elements are communications: "Social systems use communication for their particular mode of autopoietic reproduction. Their elements are communications which are recursively produced and reproduced by the network of communications and which cannot exist outside of such a network (Luhmann, 1986: 174)."

By making communications the core elements of social systems, Luhmann breaks with the common notion in philosophical and sociological

tradition that persons should be the smallest unit of social phenomena (Kneer & Nassehi, 1993: 65-66). In this tradition it is common practice to understand, say society, as a social system consisting of individuals and their relations. This assumption is set aside in Luhmann's theory on social systems. In his view, social systems do not consist of individuals, but of communications²². Individuals are considered to be part of the environment of a social system. Luhmann considers communication not as a consequence of human behaviour, but as a product of social systems. As he argues in inimitable vocabulary: "Der Mensch kan nicht kommunizieren; nur die Kommunikation kann kommunizieren (1990: 31)."

Social systems can be seen as systems in themselves, not consisting of persons or individuals, but of communications. Communications build their own idiosyncratic process. A communicative connection is a system in itself, fundamentally different from an immune system or a psychic system. In Luhmann's theory, communicative connections have their own dynamics. They are a result of the constitution of social systems. In other words, social systems are autopoietic systems, because they are constituted through a recursive process of connecting communication to communication.

Like any other social system, branding does not consist of persons either²³. Nor is it a product of the ability of a person or collectivity of persons to communicate. It should be understood as a communicative connection with its own dynamics; an 'order' that is constituted by linking communication with communication. The branding system can be seen as a social system that reproduces itself in a recursive process of related communications.

The constitution of the branding system is comparable with other social systems, like a families, organizations or societies. However, although their basic way of reproduction is the same, the branding system differs from these other social systems in some respects. The branding system is a peculiar social system. In two ways, communication in a branding system takes place in a more remote way²⁴.

First of all, the communicative actions which constitute the branding system are mainly 'medium mediated'. In organizations and family communities communication often takes place while the members are in each other's company. In the case of the branding system, however, communication is mediated via all sorts of media such as radio, television, internet, research agencies, etc.. *Secondly*, in most cases, the members of a family and an organization know each other personally. In case of a branding

system, the brander and brand user usually do not. Even the most fanatic Coke drinker will not know the brander. Only when the brander is a service company, it becomes more obvious that both the brander and brand user are related to each other in a more personal way.

Despite the differences between the branding system and the organization or family as social system²⁵, the branding system can be considered as social system. Being within the scope of branding, the operations (or communications or communicative actions respectively) of the brander and brand user become mutually connected to one another. Branding makes the actions of the brander relevant for the brand user and vice versa. In a branding system, they function as *communicative* actions that relate to the past and following actions.

The question is, when do the communicative actions of the brander or brand user become part of the branding system? For instance: if a branded truck is driving on the road, is that a branding action, and hence part of the branding system, or not? To answer this, we have to specify our notion of communication.

2.3.3 *The branding system and communication*

A branding system can be understood as a communicative complex connection (re)produced by communications. Imagine a possible operation of the brand user, the purchase of a sporting shoe. In our view, this operation can be considered as a contribution to a branding system, i.e. as a component of communication that is part of the (re)production process of building that specific branding system. The purchase of a sporting shoe by the brand user can be considered as communication when it is perceived by the brander as a message. It can be understood as a communication of a specific branding system if it is perceived by the brander as a message in relation to the performances of that specific brand.

Underlying our notion of the branding system – and consequently the premise that ‘buying a sporting shoe’ is a communication – is a specific view of communication. The idea that the purchase of a sporting shoe is a communicative ‘branding’ action which is constitutive for the branding system can only be understood if we reject an *intentional* or *action theoretical* notion of communication. We have to reject the idea that it is the sender that decides whether a particular action is communication. An intentional notion of communication (Stappers, 1983: 42) is based on the idea that it is the sender who decides whether his actions are commu-

nicative or not. The intentional notion of communication implies that an action is communicative when there is a sender who has the intention to announce something to somebody. Once this condition is met the action is considered a communicative action.

If we project this notion of communication on branding, we can consider the brander as the sender. From this perspective an advertising campaign can be considered as a communicative action: it is an action that intends to make an announcement to brand users. However, this perspective makes it rather difficult to consider the purchase of a sporting shoe as a communicative 'branding' action. In that case, we should perceive the brand user as the sender. The action itself is not intended to be an announcement for the brander. Very few consumers buy a sporting shoe to make something clear to the brander. So, how can we understand the actions of a brand user as communicative actions contributing to the branding system?

The purchase of a sporting shoe can be a communicative action if it is the receiver who determines whether a particular action is communicative or not. Luhmann's notion of communication is based on this idea. For Luhmann communication is the synthesis of an information, utterance and understanding ('Verstehen'). Information refers to the content of the utterance, against the background of other possible contents. Communication is informative because it places a particular content 'in the limelight' against the background of other contents. It is informative because it actualises a particular selection: "Die Selektion, die in der Kommunikation aktualisiert wird, konstituiert ihren eigenen Horizont; sie konstituiert das, was sie wählt, schon als Selektion, nämlich als Information. Das, was sie mitteilt, wird nicht nur ausgewählt, es ist selbst schon Auswahl und wird deshalb mitgeteilt (Luhmann, 1984: 194)." Information can only be considered as communicative, it can only get social meaning once it is uttered. That means once it gets an observable and 'understandable' form. A person who wants to inform another not only has to act in such way that it can be perceived in some way or another, it also has to mould its behaviour into particular formats, standards based on conventions which are shared by others: "Codierte Ereignisse wirken im Kommunikationsprozess als Information, nicht codierte als Störung (Rauschen, noise) (Luhmann, 1984: 197)."

From an intentional or action theoretical perspective on communication, communication consists of two components: utterance and infor-

mation. From that perspective, communication is 'announcing behaviour'. A communication process is a chain of 'announcing actions'. According to Luhmann however, communication is a synthesis of information, utterance and understanding ('Verstehen'). Communication is not a 'Zweistellige', it is a 'Dreistellige Einheit'. Understanding is not to be perceived as understanding the exact meaning of a sender's utterance. Understanding in this case means that someone (an information processing system) considers a particular 'happening' (action, utterance) as a combination of uttering behaviour *and* uttered information. As Blom (1997) argues: "Understanding is the observation of behaviour of an Alter as an embodiment of two choices: before announcing (in stead of not making an utterance') and specific information (this and not that) (1997: 126)." Perceiving the ongoing rattling of a typing machine as a sign of something (the typist is in a hurry) is not understanding. If a person considers the sound as an attempt of the typist to make clear he is in a hurry, it is called understanding. To call an observation understanding, some action should not be considered as a signal, it should be considered as '*uttering behaviour*' which *informs about something specific*.

So, to consider an action as communicative action, it has to be an informing utterance ('a communicative offer'). Whether something is an informing announcement is determined by the 'understanding system'. The typist does not have to have a clue. The sound he produces is still a communicative action once the 'understanding system' considers it an attempt to say something²⁶. That means that communication also includes misunderstanding and rejection: "Communication includes understanding as a necessary part of the unity of its operation. It does not include the acceptance of its content. It is not the function of communication to provide consensus as the favoured state of mind (Luhmann, 1986: 176)."

An operation of the brander can be considered as part of the branding system once it is interpreted as being related to the branding system by the brand user and vice versa. The operation of the brander is a communicative action: it is seen by the brand user as an attempt to say something in the context of the brand. The purchase of the sporting shoe is not communication within the framework of the brand when the brander simply sees it as an act of purchase. It is a communicative action when the brander sees it as announcing behaviour in the perspective of the brand. The action is 'understood' by the brander if he can see the buying of a shoe as an act of trust displayed by the brand user to the brand. Only in

this case can it be seen as an informing behaviour by the brand user concerning the brand. This is even the case when the brand user himself does not consider it as such an act at all, but only as a routine purchase. Consider the possible difference between an accountant and a brand manager. The first one would be inclined to see the act of a purchase only as a sign of economic growth, whereas the second could see it as uttering behaviour of a brand user as well. The first does not have to be susceptible to the intentions of the brand user, the latter does.

Luhmann's notion of communication helps to answer the question when a particular operation is part of the branding system and when it is not. Only operations of the brander and the brand user can be part of the branding system, an operation of a competitor can never belong to the branding system. But, which operations by the brander belong to the branding system, and which do not? And, which operations of the brand user can we consider as branding operations and which not?

Consider the situation of the branded truck of Coca Cola driving along the highway. Is this an operation belonging to the branding system of Coca Cola, or not? In other words, how can we determine the boundaries of a branding system?

Generally, an operation is more likely to become a branding operation if it is related to the brand by its performer (either the brander or the brand user) and it is acknowledged among its performers (either among the brander or among the brand users) to be an intention to bring it into the interaction process. If one party really has the intention to relate his operation to the brand, it is more likely that the operation will be perceived as an branding operation by the other party. For instance, an advertising campaign by the brander is likely to be perceived by the brand user as a branding operation because the brander considers it as an operation related to the brand and has the intention to bring it into the interaction process (the branding system) with the brand user. For the same reason, an intended email from the brand user to the brander is likely to be perceived as an operation that is related to the brand by the brander.

However, based on Luhmann's notion of communication, the intention of communication is not a prerequisite for considering an operation a branding operation. It is the receiving party that determines whether the operation of the sender is a branding operation. When an advertising campaign of the brander is not perceived as a branding operation by brand users or not perceived at all, the preparations of the brander were

not branding operations after all. If the email is not perceived by the brander or not considered an operation related to the brand by the brander, it is not a branding operation either. Often it can only be determined whether such operations are really branding operations after they have been performed.

So, operations by the brander are branding operations if the brand user considers them as operations related to the brand and vice versa. If brander or brand user ascribes the operations of the other to the brand it is a branding operation. In the example of the branded Coca Cola truck: from a theoretical point of view, this is a communicative action belonging to the branding system if it is perceived by brand users as an action related to the brand.

For instance, let's pretend that the operation by Shell to dump the Brent Spar was not intended by the brander as a 'brand operation' and was noticed by no one except some executives of Shell itself. In that case it is not an operation that belongs to the Shell branding system. Although it was an operation by the brander, it was not perceived by the brand user as related to the brand or ascribed to the brand. Somewhat later, however, (potential) brand users related the operation to the brand. This happened after Greenpeace had given it a publicity boost. In their opinion, the dumping of the Brent Spar was an operation related to the brand. Suddenly, the operation of dumping the Brent Spar was indeed a branding operation. It became part of the branding system once the brand user perceived it as such. The reaction of Shell to reveal its motives behind the operation via mass communication was an operation of the branding system; it was intended as such, but more important it was seen by the brand user as an operation related to the brand.

So, only if the intention of the one party taking the initiative for a 'branding' operation is followed by recognition of the other as an operation concerning the brand, the intended operation can be called a branding operation.

Another possible understanding about branding can be that a specific operation can only be a branding operation if it reflects the desired image of the brand. For instance, a brander can reject a particular advertising campaign that is not carrying a message that suits the brand as not being a branding operation. In section 2.7., we will indeed argue that these operations do not contribute positively to the reproduction of the branding system. However, that does not mean they cannot be part of the branding system.

From a system theoretical point of view it is unacceptable to propose that operations not contributing positively to the existing structures of a system cannot be part of that system. That would mean that that a system cannot consist of operations threatening the existing structures of the system itself. In consequence, it would not be possible for a system to defend itself against threats, simply because they would not exist as systems operations. Moreover, it would imply that a 'system' cannot extinct itself. Of course it can. Systems can (re)produce operations that lead to its extinction.

So, even operations that do not reflect a desired image of the brand – and that do not make a positive contribution to the branding system – can be part of the branding system!

Knowing the prerequisites for calling an operation of a brander of brand user a branding operation – an operation part of the branding system –, we can now discuss the nature of the branding system in greater depth. In the next paragraph, we will treat its self reproducing character.

2.3.4 The branding system: the nature of an order

The notion of communication discussed above enables us to understand the actions of both the brander and brand user as parts of a system of communications. Social systems, like the branding system, reproduce their elements, communications, by the network of communications. The system is reproduced by communications referring to communications. The information, utterances and understandings are part of the branding system. It is by them that a branding system is created and reproduced. The fact that a purchase is seen as an intention of a brand user to display trust in a brand triggers a specific operation performed by the brander, for instance to send him information about new exclusive models only available for fans. The fact that a price cut is seen by brand users as a lack of quality awareness of the brander, can trigger a reaction of refuse to buy the product. The branding system has dynamics that are based on linking communications to communications. The branding system, in essence, is self referential: it is constituted by the reproduction of its own elements: "The synthesis of information, utterance and understanding cannot be pre-programmed by language. It has to be recreated from situation to situation by referring to previous communications and to possibilities of further communications which are to be restricted by the actual event. This operation requires self-reference. It can in no way use the environ-

ment. Information, utterances and understandings are aspects which for the system cannot exist independently of the system: they are co-created within the process of communication. Even 'information' is not something which the system takes in from the environment. Pieces of information don't exist 'out there', waiting to be picked up by the system. As selections they are produced by the system itself in comparison with something else (Luhmann, 1986: 175)."

Considering the constitution of social systems as a self referential process leads to the idea that social systems are *closed* systems. They do not use the environment for the reproduction of their elements and "... are closed systems, in the sense that their own communication can be motivated and understood only in the context of the system (Luhmann, 1986, 177)." The branding system is a closed self-referential system which is build up from communications recursively referring to other communications. In this way it reproduces its own elements. It is build up from communicative actions by the brander – referring to the past and expected communications of the system – followed by the communicative actions by the brand user – also oriented on the other system building communications. The launching of an advertising campaign by the brander is a communicative action once it is perceived as an informing utterance by the brand user. The same is true for the communicative actions of the brand user: the actions of the brand user are communicative actions once they are considered by the brander as acts informing him about something specific in the context of the brand. The purchase of a sporting shoe by a brand user is a communicative action once it is considered by the brander as information about something specific in the context of the brand. Branders want to know a lot about and create expectations of the buying behaviour of the consumer. That's why they perform market research. Filling in a survey is a communicative action by the brand user because the brander considers this informing behaviour about something specific. Branders also consider buying behaviour of brand users as informing utterances. For instance, figures about time of purchase are seen by branders as brand users saying that they want to shop longer.

Thus, a dynamics of recursive communicative actions of brander and brand user is developed, that creates an order of its own. It is the order created by communicative actions between brander and brand user that constitutes the complex of communications called the branding system:

- The brander who makes sure his products are available at particular selling points because they know from earlier communications of the brand user that these selling points are preferred, with a particular package which is seen as an informing utterance by brand users who are visiting shops and buy products, followed by branders who perceive this as informing utterance by brand users saying that 'they need more products' and in consequence, that stock should be refilled, etc.
- The brand user who does not buy the brand anymore followed by the brander who sees this as informing announcement saying that the brand's product does not satisfy. The brander that makes adjustments to the brand or product, followed by the brand user who reacts again, etc.
- The brand user who is not attracted to the brand, the brander taking this as informing announcement that people are losing interest and hence organising a brand event followed by the brand user who perceives this as an invitation to get acquainted by the brander and attending it, etc.
- The brander curious to know the preferences of the brand user, the brand user filling in the survey, the brander seeing these as informing announcements, etc.
- The brand user being used to expect a sales period in a particular time of year, the brander launching an advertising campaign to raise these expectations again.

In these examples, the branding system is constituted by relating communicative actions to communicative actions in a recursive process: communicative actions of the brander (actions which are perceived by brand users as for instance advertisements or product signs), are followed by communicative actions of the brand user (actions of the brand user are perceived in terms of research results, sales decrease etc.) and vice versa. Both brander and brand user are sender and receiver; actor and observer at the same time.

In a process of interrelating communications, the branding system is created as a chain of recursively related interactions. This creates an order in itself. The existence of such an 'order' cannot be attributed to particular properties or actions of just the brander or the brand user alone. The branding system is a chain of interactions which is created when the communicative actions of both brander and brand user become *recur-*

sively related. It is the product of a mutual activity by both brander and brand user. In other terms: the branding system is *emergent*. Emergent means: "Jene Eigenschaften eines Systems, die aus den Eigenschaften seiner Elemente nicht erklärbar sind, die mithin neu und charakteristisch nur und erst für die Ebene des jeweiligen Systems sind. Diese Eigenschaften sind nicht den Elementen zuzurechnen, sondern den bestimmten selektiven Verknüpfung der Elemente im Kontext des Systems (Willke, 1993: 278)." The existence of the branding system cannot be explained by or attributed to the separate properties or actions of either the brand user or the brander. In stead, the order of interactions reproduces itself in a process by which communicative actions become mutually related. As such, the branding system reproduces and thereby regulates itself as a social system via the reproduction of its elements, i.e. communications.

Although the emergent character of the branding system means that neither the brander nor the brand user has total control over the way the branding system develops, there are authors that argue that the influence of the brand user on the development of the branding system will become bigger in the near future. In marketing literature, the more intense participation of the brand user is perceived as an important change in the relation between brander and brand user. As Kevin Kelly (1999), former executive editor of Wired magazine argues: "But customers at least want to be involved at some level in the creation of what they use-particularly complex things they use often. They can superficially be involved by visiting a factory and watching their car being made. Or they can conveniently order a customized list of options. Or, through network technology, they can be brought into the process at various points. Perhaps they send the car through the line, much as one follows a package through FedEx.(...). The final destiny for the future of the company often seems to be the 'virtual corporation'-the corporation as a small nexus with essential functions outsourced to subcontractors. But there is an alternative vision of an ultimate destination-the company that is only staffed by customers. No firm will ever reach that extreme, but the trajectory that leads in that direction is the right one, and any step taken to shift the balance toward relying on the relationships with customers will prove to be an advantage (1998: 139)." Although it probably exaggerates, this quote suggests that the participation of the brand user is relevant in the context of branding. In the idea suggested by Kelly, the direction and development of the branding system will be more and more determined by the

customer. Its share of operations within the branding system will increase, which eventually means that its direction will be determined more and more by the brand user as well.

Despite a possible growing influence of the brand user in the amount and direction of interactions, the development of the branding system can never be ascribed to the qualities and actions of the brand user alone.

The brander system can be considered as an order, created by and via the mutually related communications of the brander and brand user. If neither both have absolute control over the development of this order, how can it become and stay an order? In the next section we will use cybernetic theory to investigate this question.

2.4 Branding as regulation of interactions

2.4.1 Introduction

In the previous section we described the branding system as a 'stable order' created by a complex of mutually related communications of the brander and brand user. In this section, we will further investigate the nature of the branding system with the help of cybernetics. Especially the notions of regulation and stability are helpful in the further investigation of the branding system. With the help of cybernetics, we can consider the branding system as a *stable* system of *self regulating* communicative actions performed by both the organization and the customer.

In paragraph 2.4.2. we will discuss the cybernetic principle of stability and regulation. In section 2.4.3. we will describe the branding system as an ultrastable system using these cybernetic principles.

2.4.2 Regulation, stability and ultrastability

The term stability is dealt with extensively in cybernetics. Stability is the state of a system in which essential variables of such system stay within acceptable limits (Ashby 1958, H. 10-12). In case of living organisms, blood pressure or body temperature are examples of such essential variables. The state of a living organism, one could say, is only stable if its blood pressure or body temperature are within certain limits. Consequently, the system is characterized by states in which the essential variables are between boundaries and states in which they fall outside the

boundaries: "The states {...} that correspond to the living organism are then those states in which certain essential variables are kept within assigned (–) limits (Ashby, 1958: 197)." In cybernetic terms, a living organism can be characterized as a system, consisting of stable states. The stability of a system – the succession of stable states – means that it stays alive (the blood pressure and/or body temperature are within certain specified limits). This stability can be threatened by all sorts of influences. Especially in such cases, regulation becomes important.

The process of maintaining stability is called regulation. Regulation refers to the process of keeping the essential variables of a system within the specified limits. As Vriens (1998: 131) explains: "Regulation means that the system has to make sure its essential variables do not cross certain limits in reaction to environmental disturbances (parameter changes) – it has to make sure the system can survive, which means that it can establish or re-establish stable states (keep the essential variables within acceptable limits)."

The process of regulation can be captured in a diagram (Ashby, 1958: 198):

$$D \dashrightarrow F \dashrightarrow E$$

In this diagram: "E [...] is the set of essential variables, D is the source of disturbances and the dangers [...] from the rest of the world, and F is the interpolated part [...] for the protection of E." The disturbances (D) try to reach E, but F serves as a regulating mechanism, which prevents the disturbances to reach the essential variables: "[...] an essential function of F as a regulator is that it shall block the transmission of variety from disturbance to essential variable (Ashby, 1958: 199)."

Ashby gives an example of a 'thermostatically-controlled water-bath' (1958: 198). The system which has to be regulated (the focal system) is the 'water-bath'. The essential variable refers to the temperature of the water, which has to stay between say 36c and 37c. D stands for the set of disturbances, which cause the water temperature to drop or to rise. F is the mechanism which has to make sure that the temperature stays within the prespecified limits. Ashby: "F, by its action, tends to lessen the effect of D on E (1958: 198)."

F as a regulator tries to block the transmission of variety from disturbance to essential variable in a specific way. The regulating mechanism disposes of regulating actions R. These regulating actions are used to pre-

vent the essential variables from being crossed. As Vriens (1998: 132) shows, a table can be made which indicates that different regulating actions can be distinguished in reaction to different disturbances:

	R1	R2	...	Rj
D1	+	-		+
D2	-	+		+
...	
Dj	-	+		-

Figure 2.2

The rows indicate the possible disturbances (D1 t/m Dj) and the columns (R1 t/m Rj) indicate the possible regulating actions. The cells of the table show the possible states of the essential variables EV, which correspond with a particular combination of a disturbance and a regulating action. With every disturbance, the regulator F has to pick a particular regulating action R in such way that the acceptable value is reached (that means, the state of EV is within limits).

The cells which have a + indicate the states where the essential variables are within the limits, the cells with a – indicate the states where the regulator F does not find a regulating action R that can keep the essential variables between their limits. If a row with only a – appears, the regulator cannot find a regulating action. If in one row, there is at least one +, it means that the regulator can find at least one regulating action in reaction to the disturbance. In consequence, the essential variable can stay within its limits.

Stability refers to a state of a system in which its essential variables are within specified limits. Regulation is performed to maintain stability, i.e. to prevent the essential variables to cross in reaction to disturbances. Stability – stable states representing operations that are within certain limits – enables the reproduction of systems. Successive stable states create a pattern, an order that can be called a system.

Vriens (1998: 130) has argued that regulation can take place by an external regulator, which means that regulation of a system is carried out by another system. A system can also regulate itself. In such case of ‘self regulation’, the regulator is part of the system that is being regulated. A

self regulated system can block disturbances by performing operations by its own. As we will see in the next paragraph, self regulation plays an important role in branding. That is why we will now discuss self regulation from a cybernetic perspective.

Ashby's description of an ultrastable system can be considered as an attempt to define a self regulating system in cybernetic terms. With the help of figure 2.3 below, an ultrastable system is presented.

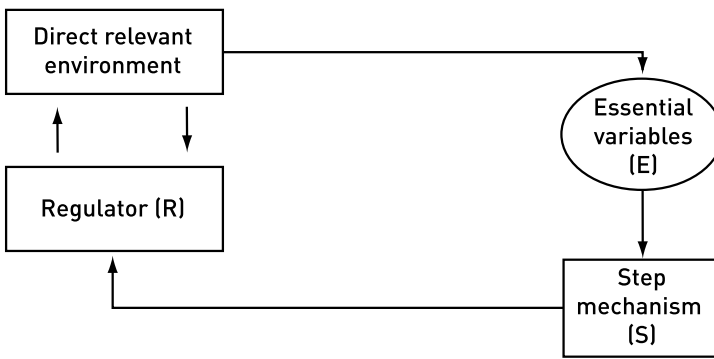


Figure 2.3 The ultrastable system (1) (Based on Achterbergh, 1999: 236)

The ultrastable system we will discuss represents an organism interacting with its environment. Figure 2.3. shows the outline of a system consisting of the environment, a regulator (R), essential variables (E) and a step mechanism (S). The system can be disturbed by its environment. For instance, a cat (the organism under investigation) is attacked by a dog. The disturbances the organism is reacting to (the dog trying to catch the cat) are part of the direct relevant environment of the organism. Regulation has to take place to make sure that these disturbances do not cause the essential variables to go beyond the normal limits. The regulator – or better, the regulating functions of the organism (cat) – perform(s) these regulating actions so that it displays stable behaviour (the essential variables are within limits). The total system (organism and direct relevant environment) is situated in a broader environment (the indirect relevant environment) that can cause new disturbances to arise.

The regulating actions that are performed by the regulating system are based on two feedback loops. The first feedback loop goes from the organism to the direct relevant environment. It consists of a constant motor output and sensory input from the organism (this is depicted by the

two arrows and reflects the normal interaction between organism and environment within a particular mode of behaviour). The second loop goes from the direct relevant environment to the regulating organism via the essential variables. If there is a threat that they will cross certain limits (and the 'normal' interaction between organism and environment does not work) the mode of behaviour has to be adjusted. As Ashby describes: "Two systems [...] interact, so that a primary feedback exists between them. Another feedback, working intermittently and at a much slower order of speed, goes from the environment to certain [...] variables which in their turn affect some step-mechanisms, the effect being that the step-mechanisms change value when and only when these variables pass outside given limits (Ashby, 1960: 98)."

Let's say that the cat feels threatened by the dog. Interactions between the cat and the dog make the cat want to escape. The mode of behaviour of the cat is 'escaping'. These interactions between the cat and the dog – movements represented by the first feedback loop – make it possible for the cat to make all sorts of movements within the mode of behaviour 'escape'. If the dog approaches more and more, the essential variables are threatened and the cat has to turn to a new mode of behaviour. Once it has changed its mode of behaviour, the interactions within that mode are part of the first feedback loop again. The actual change in mode of behaviour is represented by the second feedback loop. It takes place via a step mechanism that is situated between the essential variables and the regulating function. It indicates that a particular situation has become too dangerous and a new mode of behaviour has to be performed.

So, the cat in our example can have different 'appropriate behaviours' in order to be adapted to different kinds of situations. The cat needs a memory to store any information about earlier experiences with particular situations. If it does not have one, it has to find out new appropriate modes of behaviour every time it is confronted with a particular situation. In order to take advantage of recurrent situations, the cat somehow has to accumulate adaptations it has made to earlier situations (add new ones without destroying the old ones). To make this possible, some memory function has to be build into the system that enables it to trigger a particular mode of behaviour in reaction to particular disturbances based on earlier experiences with these situations. This function is called the gating mechanism. In figure 2.4. below, the gating mechanism is shown as a function between the essential variables and regulating system.

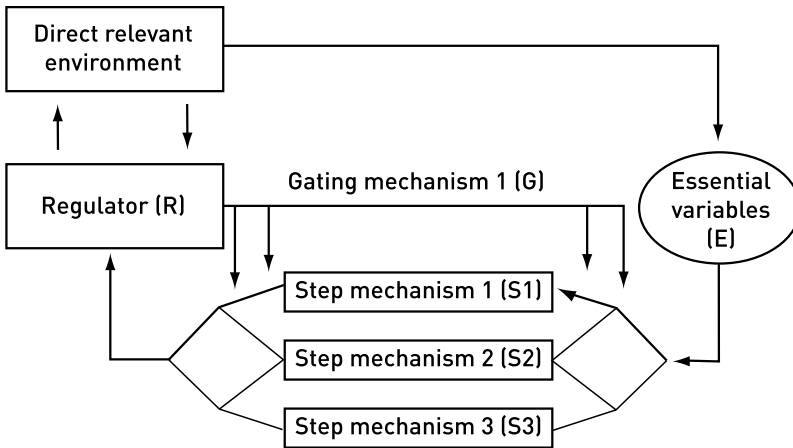


Figure 2.4. The ultrastable system (2) (Based on Achterbergh & Reisewijk, 1999: 239)

The gating mechanism is connected to the sensory input channel of the regulating system. By that, it 'knows' which mode of behaviour is suitable in reaction to particular situations. If a particular situation occurs, this gating mechanism triggers a certain mode of behaviour by influencing the selection of behaviour (between the E and S) and enabling the system to transmit this to the regulating system (between S and R). For example, an 'escape' mode of behaviour pursued by a cat is based on earlier – less pleasant – experiences the cat might have with dogs. The cat does not have to go through that again and again. In stead, it has a 'gating mechanism' that triggers the 'right' mode of behaviour based on earlier experiences with these situations. In that way, the cat can benefit from previous adaptations (combination of the occurrence of a situation and a reacting mode of behaviour) in a world that confronts it with recurrent situations. So, a system can maintain stability by changing its mode of behaviour, either via the first or second feedback loop.

The last way in which the ultrastable system can maintain stability is by making changes to the (values of) the essential variables. Imagine the essential variables of the cat (let's say a certain amount of blood) is changed because it is threatened too much. This last way of maintaining stability suggests that the necessary amount of blood needed for the cat to survive would be changed by the cat itself. In case of the cat, this is hard to imagine. However, in case of organizations, it is common practice. If certain goals are considered as essential variables for an organisation, it is

possible that these are changed or adapted during a process by the organisation itself. In the discussion of the branding system as ultrastable system in the next section, we will explore this possibility in greater depth. For now, we will confine ourselves to giving an abstract description of the ability of changing the essential variables.

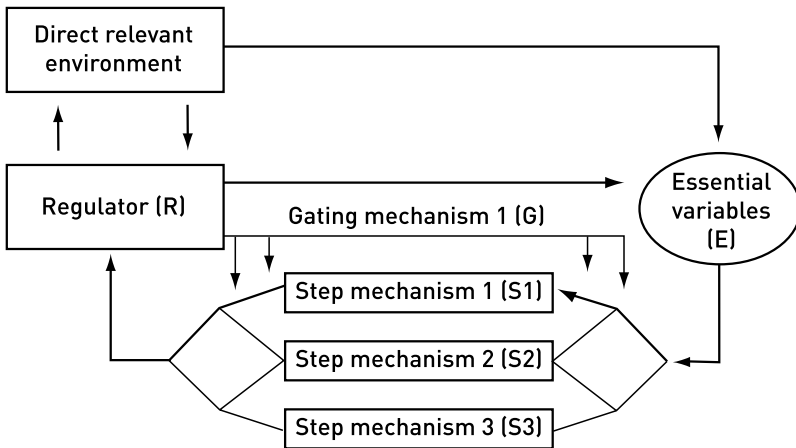


Figure 2.5. The ultrastable system (3) (Based on Achterbergh, 1999: 241)

In figure 2.5 above, a line is drawn between the regulating system and the essential variables. This line implies that the ultrastable system can change its essential variables in reaction to certain dangers.

So far, we have supposed that in case of a disturbance, the gating mechanism of an ultrastable system triggers a mode of behaviour that causes different behaviour of the regulating system towards its environment, given a certain essential variable. As a result of a relation between the regulating system and the essential variables, the essential variables can be changed as well. Based on these new essential variables, the gating mechanism might trigger a new mode of behaviour based on that new essential variable.

In conclusion, we argue that the reproduction of systems can be related to the notions of stability and regulation. Successive stable states reproduce a system having the ability to display adapted behaviour. To maintain stability, regulating actions have to be performed. The ultrastable system is a system that *regulates itself* by being able to trigger different modes of behaviour to reach a state of stability. Above, we have shown the different possibilities of doing so.

In the next paragraph, we will see that the branding system can be described as an ultrastable system.

2.4.3 The branding system as an ultrastable system

In section 2.3, we have described the branding system as a social system that is built up from the operations of brander and brand user that are geared to one another because – at least – the operation of the one is considered as a ‘brand operation’²⁷ by the other and vice versa. These operations are communications (which include transactions). As being mutually connected to each other, they form a system (some sort of ‘order’) of operations called the branding system.

This system can be regarded as an ultrastable system. In this paragraph, we will describe the branding system as an ultrastable system. In succession, the essential variables and regulation of the branding system are described.

The essential variables of the branding system

In the example of the cat and the dog, the viability of the system (the cat) is – among others – based on blood pressure; if the blood pressure of the cat drops below or rises above a certain values the system is supposed to ‘die’. But when does a branding system die? In other words, what are its essential variables? Is it the amount of people buying the brand? Is it the production capacity of the brander or the cultural acceptance of the brand itself?

The branding system is a system of interactions; some sort of order produced by recursively connected operations. As we saw in the previous paragraph, this order is based on the fact that a system manages to create stable states by keeping essential variables within limits, thus keeping the system viable. Staying viable means maintaining such an order. To understand what is essential to the viability of such system – to be able to define the essential variables of the branding system – we will have to know how order in interaction is created.

One could suggest that the key to stability in interaction lies in the integration of goals two parties have that engage in interaction. By the same token, order in interaction can be problematic because of the chaotic-coincidental character of the goals that are pursued by the different actors (Blom, 1997: 110). The American sociologist Parsons²⁸ made a profound

analysis of the nature of order in interaction. He suggests that the lack of and at the same time the possibilities to create order in interaction are rooted not in the randomness of 'ends' but in the randomness of expectations. The key for the explanation of order in interaction does not lie in the integration of ends of the different actors, it lies in the mutual adjustment of the expectations which actors have of each other's behaviour Alter. According to Parsons, order in interaction is possible when Ego and Alter can expect each others expectations; if Ego knows what Alter expects of his behaviour and vice versa.

But, how are actors able of doing so, when they are not able to read each others mind?

Parsons & Shills (1962) have identified a minimal condition for the creation of mutual expectations. In their terms the reciprocity of expectations is mediated by culture²⁹. They argue that Alter and Ego can anticipate the possible action of each other effectively over a longer period of time because they share a relatively generalized culture. This culture is generalized, it exceeds a specific situation and can be applied in various contexts (Blom, 1997: 112). As Parsons & Shills state: "a common culture (...) through which their interaction is mediated (1962: 105)".

Stabilization of expectations by cultural patterns is possible if Alter and Ego let their behaviour guide by such a culture: "It will... be a condition of stabilization of such a system of complementary expectations not only that ego and alter should communicate, but that they should react appropriately to each other's action. A tendency toward consistent appropriateness of reaction is also a tendency toward conformity with a normative pattern. The culture is not only a set of symbols of communication but a set of norms for action (Parsons & Shills, 1962: 106)." By mediation of cultural patterns, which enable reciprocity in expectations, interactions can be stabilized. Cultural patterns are 'norms for actions' shared among those who interact. Thus, they enable 'order in interaction'.

The role of generalized patterns in creating and maintaining interaction is also crucial in case of branding. In a branding system reciprocity of expectations is mediated by a general concept, the concept of the brand³⁰. The brand as a generalized concept mediates in the development and maintenance of the branding system. It is an intermediate vehicle by which the operations of the brander are related to those of the brand user and vice versa³¹.

For the maintenance of the branding system the brand as a genera-

lized concept has to play a role in the behaviour of both the brander and brand user. The *first essential variable* of the branding system therefore is the maintenance and preservation of some mutually shared generalized brand concept through that behaviour. More in particular, the generalized brand concept as an essential variable has to have impact on both the brander and brand user.

- the brander and/or the brand user have insufficient knowledge of the concept
- the brander and/or the brand user have insufficient preference for it
- the brander and/or the brand user do not sufficiently use it as a norm for action ³²

Insufficient means in this case: to the extent where it endangers the branding system. It depends on the specific branding system what specific the 'degree of impact' is needed for survival.

The *second essential variable* relates to the interactions themselves. Each branding system needs some critical mass of 'exchanges' between the brander and brand user. This can be an exchange of information, of goods and services and/or money. For a brander for instance, the amount of goods that is sold is crucial to its success. His investments in the branding system will depend largely on the amount of goods or services that can be sold. For instance, a brander might give up a branding system because it does not pay off anymore: the (expected) 'amount of interactions' is not enough to put effort in it. In other words, the brander's investments will depend on the expected efforts of the brand user. The brand user's efforts – also – will depend on the investments made by the brander.

It depends on the particular branding system which amount of interactions is needed to 'keep it alive'. Some systems are threatened by a certain amount of interactions which is not a threatening norm for another system at all. For instance, some branding systems in the fast moving consumer goods category need a high rate of circulation of goods. If not, the system cannot be maintained from a purely economic point of view. Obviously, the maintenance of a branding system in the car industry is related to a totally different rate of circulation – amount of interactions. Some industries require a high rate of information exchange between brander and brand user than other. Branding systems in 'high involvement service industries' (personal finance, consulting) obviously need a higher rate of information exchange than brands in 'low involvement

service industries' (insurance) or brands in fast moving consumer goods industries.

Moreover, branding systems differ with respect to the object of exchange vital for its maintenance. For a political party, the exchange of information is important and for an enterprise the exchange of money is relatively important to its survival as a branding system.

In general, the brander is oriented more towards the maintenance of the brand. It is the brander that regulates with the intention to preserve the branding system.

So far, we have explored the determinants of the viability of the branding system³³. We have discussed that the branding system concerns some sort of order (re)-produced by recursively related operations. In that sense, the branding system is a 'stable' system: it is a system that is stable once the operations are between the limits of the identified essential variables. However, the branding system is not 'just' a stable system. Having defined the essential variables we are able to explain how the branding system can be understood as an ultrastable system.

The regulation of the branding system: the branding system as ultrastable system

In our example of the 'thermostatically-controlled water-bath' there is one regulator: the thermostat. For each disturbance (D) it performs regulating actions (R) to make sure the water temperature stays between 36c and 37c. It is the thermostat that regulates. The (re) production of the branding system, however, is a result of the regulating operations of both the brander and brand user. The regulation of the branding system is not performed by one central agent. Regulation of the branding system takes place by the operations themselves. The branding system regulates itself in the connection between the regulating operations of the brander and brand user. The branding system thus chooses different modes of behaviour itself in attempts to keep the essential variables of that system between acceptable limits.

In the previous paragraph, we presented the ultrastable system by using the example of an organism (a cat) being threatened by another organism (a dog). The system under investigation – the cat – was represented in this example as a whole. In contrast with this example, the branding system as an ultrastable system is composed of two 'parts': the operations of the brander and the operations of the brand user.

In figure 2.6 the branding system is represented as an ultrastable system. The branding system as ultrastable system has four functions: a regulating function (regulator), a step mechanism, a gating mechanism and essential variables. The regulating function is performed by the operations of the brander and brand user. The ultrastable system is related to a direct relevant environment, representing the disturbances the system is dealing with³⁷. The direct relevant environment consists of influences that can possibly disturb the essential variables³⁸.

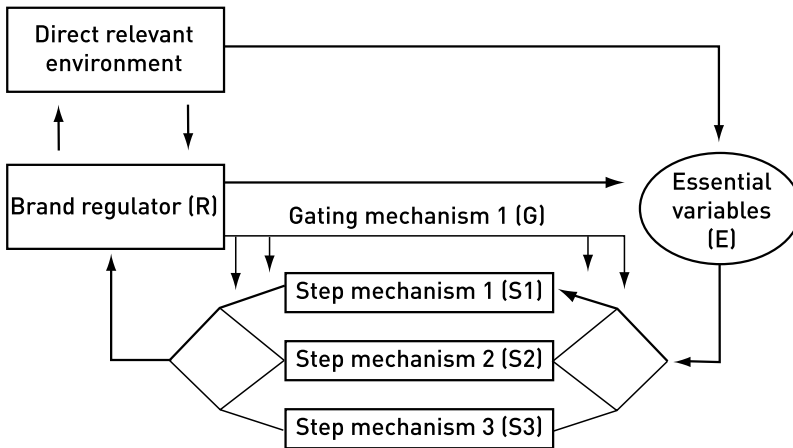


Figure 2.6. The branding system as ultrastable system

As we discussed in the previous paragraph, a system can be disturbed by its environment. Consider a situation in which a competing brand B is launching a new internet site that attracts brand users of a particular brand A. Moreover, the internet site proves to be a new powerful distribution channel as well. In that case, the amount of interactions needed for the viability of brand A drops because this new distribution channel of brand B 'steals' turnover from brand A. In result, one of the essential variables of the brand – the critical amount of interactions – is threatened. It could also happen for instance that – due to sub cultural changes – the shared generalized concept is losing its relevance. Camel's 'adventurous man' advertising campaign perfectly fitted with the 'macho-ism' of the eighties. In the beginning of the nineties, when cultural preferences had changed into more feminine values the brander Camel felt the necessity to make changes to the brand. The brander Camel reacted to the threat of the other essential variable; the threat that the brand Camel as

generalized concept could lose its impact among brand users³⁶.

In other words, due to disturbances in its direct relevant environment, the branding system can be threatened because the critical amount of interactions is threatened or impact of the generalized brand concept is insufficient. In reaction to these disturbances, regulating actions have to be performed. As we discussed in the previous paragraph, there are three ways in which the ultrastable system can deal with such disturbances:

- By placing a feedback loop between the regulating function and its direct relevant environment. In that case, regulation takes place *given* a line of behaviour and *given* (the admitted values of) the essential variables.
- By placing a feedback loop that goes via the essential variables, while preserving the same essential variables. Stated otherwise, regulation takes place by means of a change in a line of behaviour *given* (the admitted values of) the essential variables.
- By placing a feedback loop that goes via the essential variables. In this case, the values of the essential variables are changed. Regulation of the branding system is performed by changing the (admitted values of) the essential variables.

We will now discuss these feedback loops.

Ad 1 The first feedback loop

The branding system as ultrastable system regulates itself in interaction between the operations between brander and brand user. The branding system has to deal with disturbances that either threaten the impact of the generalized brand concept or threaten the amount of interactions needed for the branding system to survive. In general, the regulation of the branding system in reaction to such disturbances takes place by the interaction between the brander's and brand user's operations. In reaction to a disturbance, the brander performs regulating actions that affect the operations of the brand users and vice versa. In the connection of these operations, the threat is either neutralized, or not.

In case of this form of regulation, the branding system performs regulating actions without changing its mode of behaviour and the values of the essential variables. This is different in case of other forms of regulation, which will be discussed later in this paragraph and in which the branding system changes its mode of behaviour. In these other forms, the mode of behaviour is changed in two respects. First of all, the mode of be-

haviour is changed by changing the means by which brander and brand user communicate. For instance, there is a change in the branding system's mode of behaviour if the dominant means of communication between brander and brand user changes from 'mass media advertising' into 'internet dialogue'. A similar change in a mode of behaviour can also imply a change in marketing tools. For instance, there is a change in the branding system's mode of behaviour if the way of distribution is changed or new products or services are launched. Secondly, a change in the branding system's mode of behaviour implies that the concept behind the communication of brander and brand user is changed. For instance, Marlboro used its famous 'Marlboro man' as a communication concept for years.

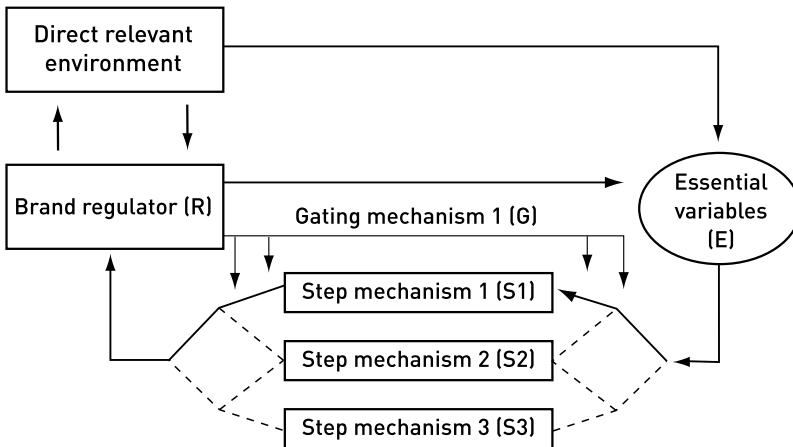


Figure 2.6 a : the first feedback loop

Based on that concept, the brander made a lot of advertisements and the brand user was attracted to the brand. It was used as a symbol for communication. Although the advertisements were different through the years, the concept stayed the same. The communication between the brander and the brand users was related to the adoption of the 'Marlboro man concept'. In the beginning of the nineties of the previous century, Marlboro adopted a new communication concept; a new mode of behaviour was triggered by the branding system.

So, in case of the first form of regulation, the branding system deals with disturbances successfully without changing its mode of behaviour, which means that neither the means of communication nor the concept

behind communication are changed in reaction to these disturbances. In figure 2.6.a above, this first way of regulation is depicted. The relation between the regulating function of the branding system and the direct relevant environment is pictured by one pair of arrows: one pair representing the sensory input of the branding system (a perception of that threat by the brander and/or brand user) and one representing the motor output of the branding system (the brander's and/or the brand user's operations).

There is a continuous 'interaction' between the branding system and its direct relevant environment in such way that the essential variables are not being threatened seriously because of the regulating abilities of the branding system. Imagine a possible disturbance to a branding system which can threaten the second essential variable, i.e. the critical amount of interactions. The brand users of brand A are attracted to brand B because a new product is launched by branding system B, competing with the products of brand A. The perception of this by the brand user and its reaction to that – resulting in a sales drop of 'brand B products' – is a possible threat to the branding system. Such a threat can be resolved in interaction between the operations of the brand users and the operations of the brander of brand A. In this stage of regulation, neither the means of nor the concepts behind communication are changed. If the brander uses mass communication media to communicate with the brand user, he can increase the investments in these marketing communication means in an attempt to increase the awareness of brand A. He does not change the means of communication, he only changes the way they are used. In return for this, it is possible that the brand user's reaction is to ignore the other products and return to buying those of brand B. In that way, the threat of switching to brand B is blocked by the interaction between the brander's and brand user's operations without a change in the mode of behaviour. Thus, a threat to the second essential variable (the critical amount of interactions) is blocked.

The feedback loops between the brander and brand user's operations on the one hand and the direct relevant environment on the other might block the disturbances from causing the essential variables getting crossed. In this first feedback loop, possible threats are resolved in immediate interaction between the branding system and its environment. The branding system operates within the same mode of behaviour (communication takes place via the same means and with maintenance of the communication concept) and takes 'care of the situation' without the essential variable being threatened seriously.

Ad 2 The second feedback loop

Via this second feedback loop, the branding system chooses new modes of behaviour based on the same essential variables in reaction to disturbances. This is the feedback loop that goes between the direct relevant environment and the regulating system via the essential variables. (see figure 2.6 b)

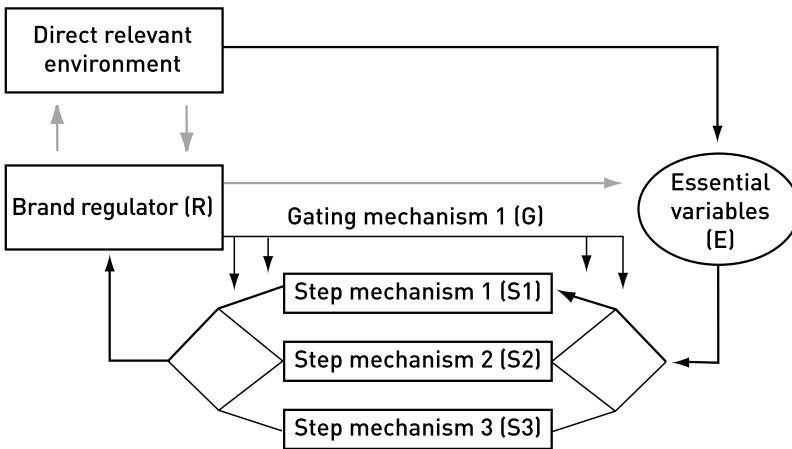


Figure 2.6 b The second feedback loop

For instance, the brand users of brand A have become that interested in the new products launched by brand B that some of them are switching to that brand. The regulating mechanisms via the first feedback loops (increased mass media efforts by the brander) did not work. One of the essential variables of the branding system – the critical amount of interactions – is threatened seriously and cannot be blocked by the direct interaction process between the regulating system and the direct relevant environment. The branding system has to show a different mode of behaviour. This change in mode of behaviour takes place by mediation of a gating mechanism and a step mechanism. If a series of particular behaviours within one mode of behaviour do not succeed (the interaction between brander and brand user with the use of particular mass media) the essential variables stay in danger. This does not last long, and by mediation of a gating mechanism, the step mechanism is triggered to set course to another mode of behaviour. In reaction to this threat, the brander can decide to apply new marketing tools to increase the level of interaction with the brand user. Instead of just increasing the budget for mass media

advertising for the existing products, he can also decide to launch a totally new product as a driver for the communicative actions between brander and brand user. If this new product introduction is successful, it can restore the level of interaction between the brander and brand user and block the threat. This reaction could be based on the fact that the branding system has dealt earlier with this situation. The regulating system of the branding system recognizes the operations of a competing brand as threatening and automatically responds by a brander's operation (introducing a new product).

Another other example could be (sub) cultural changes that threaten the appreciation of the advertising campaign and thus the impact of the generalized concept with the brand user. Suppose that the first feedback loop (a new commercial launched by the brander) could not solve this. The branding system could switch to a new mode of behaviour by mediation of the gating mechanism and the step mechanism. One possible new mode of behaviour – as a result of earlier experiences 'stored' and activated by the gating mechanism – is that the brander launches a whole new campaign, based on a different communication concept and communication channels that anticipate the changes in (sub) cultural preferences³⁷. This new mode of behaviour could prevent a decrease in impact of the brand by adaptation of the brander's communicative actions to the (sub) cultural changes.

In both the cases sketched above, the disturbances are blocked by a change in the mode of behaviour of the branding system. In both cases, a change is made in the means by which and/or the concept behind the communication between the brander and brand user. Yet, the values of the essential variables are maintained.

Ad 3 The third feedback loop

It is possible that the branding system is not capable of blocking the disturbances either via the first or the second feedback loop. In that case, a continuous change in modes of behaviour cannot prevent that the essential variables are threatened seriously. The last possibility to restore stability is to change the values of the essential variables of the branding system. This, of course is only possible to some extent. The values of the essential variables cannot simply be adapted or changed dependent on the disturbance a branding system faces. The degree of impact of the generalized brand concept as well as the amount of interactions of a branding system is related to certain critical limits. Below these, the branding sys-

tem simply cannot exist. The flexibility to make changes to these critical limits depends on the constellation of environmental threat and characteristics of the branding system.

For instance, in reaction to the popularity of a competing product, the sales of the products of brand A might drop that dramatically that the brander has to decide to stop selling these products. If this is the only product of the brand, the critical amount of interactions drops below the prespecified limits of that essential variable. Temporarily, 'the death' of the branding system can be prevented because the other essential variable can still be between acceptable limits. There are examples of brands whose products are not being sold anymore, but whose generalized brand concept remains impactful for brand users. These are brands, for instance, that carry products that are exchanged between collectors. In cases such as this, the branding system can be revitalized once the brander recognizes the potential of this phenomenon and relaunches the old or some products of that brand for this very selected group of collectors. In these cases however, the values of the essential variables are changed: one changes the critical amount of interactions needed for the viability of the branding system.

It is also possible that the branding system ceases to exist because the generalized brand concept has lost impact on the part of the brander and brand user dramatically. In this case, the values of the first essential variable are below the prespecified limits. Theoretically, the branding system can still be kept 'viable' because the second essential variable stays between its prespecified limits: the critical amount of interactions between brander and brand user is maintained, however with an unacceptably low impact of a shared generalized brand concept. This would be the case in situations where the government forces people to buy products of a particular brand or in countries or situations where there are no alternative products or services to acquire.

So, under these peculiar circumstances, it is possible that the branding system is 'kept alive' despite the fact that the values of one of the essential variables are below acceptable limits.

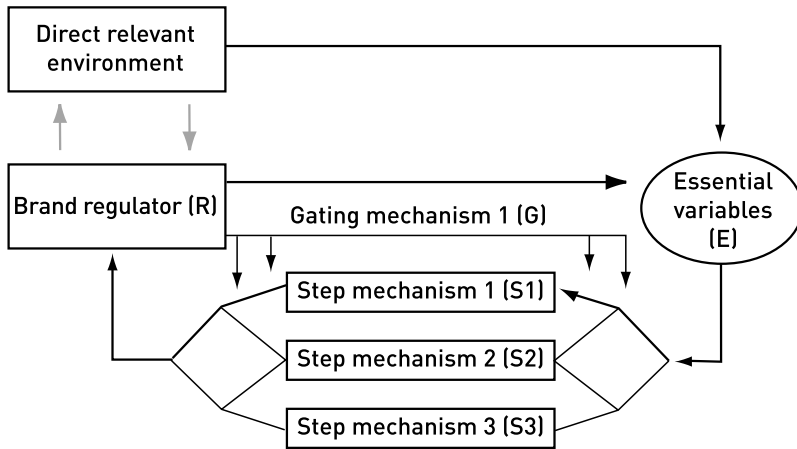


Figure 2.6 c The third feedback loop

However, in some cases, it is possible that the branding system is revitalized by changing the values of its essential variables. As figure 2.6.c illustrates, there is a connection between the regulating system of the branding system and the essential variables of the branding system. These essential variables define the variables that determine the viability of the branding system; the impact of the shared generalized brand concept and the critical amount of interactions. In reaction to disturbances, the new modes of behaviour which are triggered by the gating mechanism do not help. So, the values of (one of the) essential variables are changed by the regulating system and new modes of behaviour are triggered by the gating mechanism, which are based on these new essential variables.

For instance, if the branding system is threatened by the launch of a competing product, the 'death' of the branding system might be prevented because the critical amount of interactions and the criteria for impact of the generalized brand concept are adapted: the expectations about the critical mass of interactions and 'brand impact' are lowered and the brander makes its production operation a more efficient operation. In many 'mature markets' where overall market sales is dropping permanently, this is a common strategy performed by branders. The expectations about the amount of interactions are lowered and the business system of the brander is adapted to that.

So, the branding system has different possibilities for regulating behaviour in reaction to a particular disturbance:

- the brander and brand user display ‘interaction behaviour’ *given* a certain mode of behaviour (certain communication means and communication concept) and *given* the values of the essential variables.
- the brander and brand user show a new mode of behaviour (applying new means of communication and/or a new communication concept), *given* the values of the essential variables.
- the brander and brand user display a new mode of behaviour (communication means and communication concept) that is based on different values of the essential variables (different norms for impact of the brand concept and amount of interactions).

At the end of the previous section, we concluded that neither the brander nor the brand user have exclusive power over how the branding system develops. We asked ourselves the question how there can still be an ‘order’ if neither of these parties has ultimate ‘control’. In this section, we have used cybernetic principles to explain some principles behind this ‘ordering process’. The branding system – defined in the previous section as a system of mutually connected operations of brander and brand user – was described here as an ultrastable system; as a system that is able to regulate itself. We argued that the regulation of the system is based on the particular way in which the operations of the brander and the operations of the brand user are mutually relating and adjusting each other. Thus – we argued – an order is (re) produced.

Based on cybernetic theory, we distinguished two prerequisites for the existence of such an order; the so called essential variables. If these cross certain limits, the branding system ceases to exist. Moreover, cybernetic principles made it possible to describe the reproduction of this order in a systematic way; as a system of interrelating parts where the regulating function, a gating mechanism, essential variables and step mechanism all work in close connection to each other to ensure stability of that order. Finally, cybernetics made us reveal the basic mechanisms behind the reproduction of this order. We discovered that there are three ways in which the branding system can return to stability once it is threatened by disturbances.

In this section, we saw that the maintenance of a shared generalized brand concept is crucial to (an essential variable for) the viability of the branding system. In the next section we will investigate the nature of the brand and analyse the contribution of the branding system to the development of the brand.

2.5 The brand as a generalized concept

In section 2.3, we defined the brand as a mediator in the interaction process between the brander and brand user. Moreover, we argued that the brand is capable of doing so because it is a concept. To understand the nature of the brand and its relation to interaction, we will now discuss the nature of concepts³⁸.

Concepts help us to make sense of the world and by doing so, they direct the way we act. For instance, we have a concept of 'anger'. Lakoff (1987: 377) has analyzed the particular concept of 'anger' people in the Western world share. In his discussion, this concept is depicted as providing a prototypical scenario in which anger follows from an offending event and leads to an attempt at control. The concept of anger is reproduced and kept alive in daily behaviour of the ones using it. It is maintained, for instance by various metaphors, like 'anger is fire', leading to thoughts or senses like 'his remark added fuel to the fire'.

Conceptual development is rooted in our daily experience with the world and with other people. According to Lakoff (1987: xiv) the most primitive concepts we use are rooted in our bodily experience with the world. Complex concepts go beyond the literal mirroring of reality and are created by using imaginative principles, like metaphor, metonymy and mental imagery. In Lakoff's view, the core of our conceptual capacity is directly grounded in perception, body movement, and experience of a physical and social character. A complex concept such as anger is reproduced in constant interaction with people from the same culture sharing the same concept or with people who have different cultural backgrounds and employing a different concept of anger. In interaction, our concept of anger is affirmed, rejected and adapted.

In the previous section, we argued that 'order in interaction' is created by mediation of a shared generalized concept. As the brief discussion above indicates, the opposite is true as well. Concepts are maintained and developed in interaction. Apparently, a shared generalized concept can not only help to maintain interaction, it is maintained by interaction at the same time.

Brands are complex concepts. Brand concepts offer people a way of making 'sense of the world'. They are used for making choices relating to purchases, politics, employment or even friendship. They help us to interpret particular situations. Brands are established in particular customer groups that already are part of other social systems. They have to

become related to the concepts that are available within those social systems. Brands make use of, amplify, change slightly or even fundamentally the concepts that are well accepted in those social systems. For instance, perfume brands amplify our concept of beauty; cigarette brands make use of our concept of freedom. Swatch changed slightly our concept of a watch as a time indicator and made it more into a fashion tool. Brands make use of, claim and can change the concepts we use for acting and making sense of the world.

As discussed in the previous section, brands as shared generalized concepts are a prerequisite for the stabilization of the branding system. Brands enable interaction between brander and brand user – play a crucial role in the stabilization of the branding system – if the communicative actions of both the brander and brand user are guided by a shared generalized brand concept. In this way, the brand helps in reproducing the branding system. Based on the discussion above, it appears that the branding system enables the maintenance and development of the brand as well. The brand can only be supportive to the stabilization of the branding system if the brander's concept of the brand is 'tested' against the brand user's concept of the brand via interaction and vice versa. This happens if the actions of the brander are 'evaluated against' his own concept of the brand and vice versa. This also applies to the brand user. The brand as a concept is affirmed or adapted by the actions of the one and the reactions of the other – i.e. in a process of interaction. It is via communication that the brand is kept alive.

In other words, the brand is not only crucial to the reproduction of the branding system, the branding system is crucial to the reproduction of the brand as well.

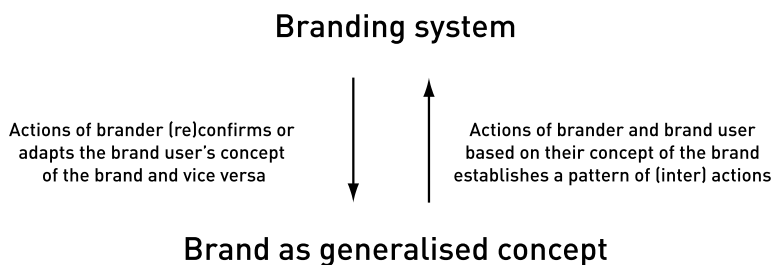


Figure 2.7 The mutually supportive relation between the brand and the branding system

To understand the notion of a brand, insight is needed in the different aspects of concepts. Lakoff distinguishes three aspects (cognition, preferences and behaviour) of concepts. First of all, a shared concept has a cognitive aspect for it embodies a certain mental 'content'. With respect to the concept 'anger', we have a shared notion of what it means to be angry or how an angry man looks like. Secondly, a concept involves certain preferences. With respect to 'anger', these can relate for instance to particular situations in which it is or is definitely not preferred to become angry. More directly, we have preferred ways of expressing anger. Finally, concepts contain particular action patterns. For instance, the fact that we hold a concept of anger in which it follows from an offending event and leads to an attempt at control, contains possible action patterns we have available when we are confronted with 'anger'.

A brand is a generalized concept that contains these three aspects as well. A brand as a concept carries *generalized cognitive patterns*. It embodies a certain 'mental content'. For instance, Volvo stands for security and safety and the brand concept of Nike contains the idea that playing sports should take place aggressively and with irreverence.

Such cognitive aspects of the shared generalized brand concept should not be confused with the notion of brand image as it is known in marketing literature. There are different definitions of 'brand image' (Franzen & Bouwman, 1999: 384-387; Poiesz, 1989). Franzen & Bouwman define brand image as: "the gestalt image of information of a brand that is stored in the memory and is shared by the members of a (sub)culture (1999: 387)". This definition suggests that the notion of brand image is related to the brand user³⁹. The brand as a shared generalized concept refers to the concept that is shared by both the brander and brand user.

Like people in the western world share a certain mental content with respect to 'anger', the brander and brand user share a certain mental content of the brand (at least in 'the ideal world of branding'). These cognitive patterns will be the main subject of our analysis. More in particular, we will study the cognitive aspects of the brander's concept of the brand. As we will argue, a brand concept is divided into different other concepts and subconcepts that are related to each other in a particular way. We will study both the content of these (sub)concepts and the way they are related to each other. By doing so, a representation of the cognitive aspects of the brander's concept of the brand is constructed.

Besides generalized cognitive patterns, the brand as a concept also carries particular *generalized preference patterns*. Brand concepts refer to 'things' and actions which should be preferred above other 'things' and actions. These generalized brand preference patterns are taken or adjusted from and referring to generalized preferences which have established in a particular culture or subculture. Brands pick up, reproduce and change these preferences. In advertising theory and practice⁴⁰ as well as in the theory of consumer behaviour, generalized brand preference patterns have got attention under the concept of 'values'. According to Rokeach, who conducted extensive research to American values, a value is: "an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence (1973:5)⁴⁴." Values can be adopted by consumers to some degree. By conducting value research, branders can gain insight in which values are preferred within a particular cultural context and to what degree they are not. Brands incorporate particular generalized preference patterns, and reproduce them into communications in such way that the brand name becomes associated with these preferences. In advertising for brands like Coca Cola, Nike or Levi's for instance, American values (concepts that reflect preferences of the American people) are reflected in the concept of the brand. Brands are criticized, also, because of their apparent ability to 'export' values of one country to other countries (Klein, 2001).

Besides cognitive and preference patterns, the brand concept also consists of *generalized behavioural patterns*. A brand's concepts (and its subconcepts) not only reflect a particular cognitive content and structure, and not only generalized preferences, but also behavioural patterns which have proved to work in interaction. Patterns which have become habits in a particular culture or subculture, like having coffee for break-

fast, dressing up before going out, playing basketball on the streets, etc.. Again, brands can use, amplify, reproduce and change existing behavioural patterns by 'incorporating' them in the brand concept⁴¹.

In this section we have described the brand as a generalized concept that is maintained by interaction between the brander and brand user. Thus, we have described the brand and the branding systems as two interrelated phenomena: the first is crucial to the existence of the second and the second cannot exist without the first. Furthermore, we have defined the brand as generalized shared concepts concerned with cognition, preferences and behaviour.

Knowing the nature of the brand and the branding system, we can now return to our original starting point: the contingency problem.

2.6 Branding as a way of dealing with contingency

2.6.1 Introduction

The previous three sections have described a general theoretical framework of branding. With this framework in mind, we can now return to our observations of section 2.2.. In that section, we argued that branding helps the brander and brand user to deal with contingency. In this section, we will use the framework to gain a better understanding of how branding is able to do so. As we will see, branding is helpful for the brander and brand user to deal with the problem of contingency in three ways.

2.6.2 *Three ways in which branding helps to deal with contingency: towards a redefinition of essential variables*

We described contingency as the awareness of 'the necessity to choose' and 'the existence of alternatives'. Contingency means that we have to choose against the background of a huge potential of other possibilities. Thus, when we choose, we are aware of the fact that every choice we make could be made otherwise.

Branding can be helpful for the brander and brand user in dealing with contingency by providing certain 'reference points' for choosing. These reference points provide boundaries for the range of alternatives one can choose from. Thus, they restrict the potential of alternatives and

help both the brander and the brand user with their process of 'making choices'.

In this paragraph, we will discuss three reference points that are offered by branding. Two of them stem from the branding system and one is created by the brand as a generalized concept. We will discuss them below.

Reference points provided by the branding system: structure and process

The branding system helps brander and brand user to deal with contingency in two ways: via its *structure* and its *processes*⁴².

A branding system, like all social systems, builds *structures*. As we argued, social systems are built in a recursive process of linking communicative actions to one another. The structure of a social system refers to the fact that there is a limitation to link communications to other communications. Regular communications create expectations of future communications. A structure implies a selection that is based on the expectations raised by previous communications. In the case of a branding system, the old advertising campaigns and the reactions of brand users might create a structure in that they create expectations about (define degrees of freedom for the execution of) new ones; old buying behaviour and the brander's logistics might also create a structure which creates expectations around how buying behaviour takes place. As such, the structure of a branding system predetermines the creation of new communicative actions and at the same time leaves open specific possibilities for creating new ones: "Nur dadurch, dass sich in sozialen Systemen bestimmte Erwartungsstrukturen ausbilden, wird erreicht, dass nicht alle möglichen Nachfolgeelemente gleich wahrscheinlich sind; Erwartungen schränken somit den Möglichkeitsspielraum weiterer Systemelemente ein, aber sie halten zugleich auch einen eingeschränkten Möglichkeits-spielraum offen. Strukturen übernehmen die Funktion der vor-Auswahl und damit der Selektionsverstärkung. Viele der Nachfolgemöglichkeiten werden ausgeschlossen, einige wenige werden wahrscheinlich (Kneer & Nassehi, 1993: 94)."

The branding system produces expectations of future communications, based on previous connections of communications. These structures are crucial for a branding system to 'stay alive'. The branding system makes previous communicative actions of the brander and brand user 'structure' the operations they will be performing in the future. In this way, the structure of the branding system helps to exclude certain

future actions. One can compare it with a melody: the more it develops, the more probable certain tones will appear and certain others will not. The brand structures that can be found in the branding system work accordingly. They make some future communications become more likely than others. For instance, the monthly bill of a telephone company followed by a certain way of paying or the watching behaviour of a viewer watching his favourite channel at certain times when specific television programmes are being broadcasted. Another example are the expected advertising campaigns of the brander, which are influenced by their expectations of the buying behaviour of the brand user – which have been raised by their previous buying behaviour –. At the same time, the expected buying behaviour of the brand user is influenced by the expectations of future advertising campaigns by the brander – as these are raised by previous advertising behaviour. In other words, the structure of the branding system not only involves expectations of the brander and brand user based on their own communicative actions. It consists of mutually connected expectations: patterns of expectations based on previous communications of the brander influence expectations of the brand user and vice versa.

In the branding system, like in all social systems, *processes* play an important role as well. Processes are occurrences linked to each other in time. Like structures, processes imply selections, they include particular sequences and exclude others. Processes restrict the range of possible communicative actions to some extent by making it subservient to a sequence of occurrences. The range of possible communicative actions is restricted under the influence of communicative actions which occurred previously or will occur in the future. As Luhmann explains: “Prozesse kommen dadurch zustande (und der Prozessbegriff soll hier dadurch definiert sein), dass konkrete selektive Ereignisse zeitlich aufeinander aufbauen, aneinander anschliessen, also vorherige Selektionen bzw. zu erwartende Selektionen als Selektionsprämissen in die Einzelselektion einbauen (1984: 74).”

In branding systems processes play a role. For instance, brand loyalty programs are built around a sequence of communicative actions. In these programs, the brander uses moments of purchase as an invitation to communicate. American Express uses the purchase of goods with a membership card as the initiation of a communication process. Ford launched its ‘Talkback’ programme to start a continuous dialogue with its brand users (Pearson, 1996: 42-43). Or: the introduction of a new brand article divid-

ed in components, like in some cases of encyclopaedias, is a way of putting one communicative action (introducing an article) in a sequence of communicative actions (the possibility to buy related articles). In all these cases, processes help brander and brand user to make selections; they pre-determine certain selections and at the same time leave possibilities open.

Due to the structures and processes of a branding system it is more likely for some communications to occur than for others. They limit the potential of alternative communications to occur. Thus, they make it easier for the brander as well as for the brand user to deal with contingency. By restricting the potential of possible alternative communications they help both the brander and brand user to choose.

They do so in different ways however. Structures do so by making a pre-selection of communications. They exclude certain future communications – make their future appearance unlikely – on the basis of synchronized expectations based on the past. Processes do so by synchronically defining which communicative actions follow or should follow. Processes provide a (more or less) explicit framework of stages, in which certain communications follow communications in an earlier stage. In other words: “Strukturen treffen eine Vorauswahl der Anschlusselemente, indem sie bestimmte Nachfolgemöglichkeiten unwahrscheinlich machen bzw. ausschliessen. Charakteristisch für Prozesse ist somit die Vorher-/Nachher-Differenz: Im Volzug des Übergangs von einem aktuellen Ereignis zu einem dazu passenden Nachfolgereignis formieren sich Prozesse. Strukturen treffen eine Vor-Auswahl somit über Exklusion, Prozesse leisten das gleiche durch Anschlussuche (Kneer & Nassehi, 1993: 94).”

The structures and processes of a branding system can make it easier for the brander and the brand user to deal with contingency, because they restrict their potential of future communicative actions, based on previous and expected connections of future communications. The same structures and processes can help the brand user to restrict their selections of alternatives. Thus, contingency is resolved in a mutual process of connecting communications.

Reference point provided by the brand: a shared generalized concept

The second way in which branding can help the brander and brand user to deal with contingency is via the mediating role of the brand. The brand as a generalized concept helps to stabilize expectations. It provides generalized concepts which can be used as norms for interpretation or ac-

tion. As Parsons & Shills argue: "It will... be a condition of stabilization of such a system of complementary expectations not only that ego and alter should communicate, but that they should react appropriately to each other's action. A tendency toward consistent appropriateness of reaction is also a tendency toward conformity with a normative pattern. The culture is not only a set of symbols of communication but a set of norms for action (Parsons & Shills, 1962: 106)." Brands as generalized concepts can be used as shared reference points that structure behaviour of both the brander and brand user. They prescribe certain cognitive patterns, preferences and behavioural patterns. They can influence acting and thinking of brander and brand user. If the brander and brand user use the brand as reference point for their behaviour, some communications are more likely to occur than others. If a brand is shared and used by the brander or brand user, both restrict the potential of alternatives to choose from by using the same reference point. Thus, the brand as a mutually shared reference point helps to reduce contingency in interaction between the brander and brand user.

The essential variables revisited

The introduction of structure and process as ways in which the branding system can reduce contingency allows us to have a different look at the essential variables of the branding system. The second essential variable we identified in paragraph 2.4.3. – next to the impact of a generalized brand concept – is the 'amount of interactions'. For the reproduction of the branding system, a certain amount of interactions has to take place between the brander and brand user. We now know why: without a certain amount of interactions the branding system could not create structures or processes. This essential variable implies that a sufficient amount of communicative operations must exist to arouse expectations about new operations – needed to create structure- or refer to each other – needed to create processes. So, the essential variables of the branding system can be redefined on the basis of this system's theoretical elaboration. Based on the theoretical extension above, we can define the essential variables of the branding system as:

1. The impact of some generalized brand concept
2. The creation and maintenance of structure, so that a sufficient amount of communications is ensured between the brander and brand user

- 3 The creation and maintenance of processes, so that a sufficient amount of communications is ensured between the brander and brand user.

In the previous four sections, we have defined the branding system as a complex of connected communications between the brander and brand user that form an ultrastable, social and self regulating, system. The next sections of this chapter will deal with the role of the brander in the maintenance and development of the branding system.

In section 2.7., we will discuss the brander's contribution to the branding system in general. In section 2.8., we will discuss the use of 'the brand identity' in the regulation of the brander system in particular. In that section, we will also describe the objectives and questions for our empirical research.

2.7 Brand regulation: the contribution of the brander to the branding system

2.7.1 Introduction: the brander system as an ultrastable system

So far, we have considered the branding system as a self regulating and self (re)producing system. In the previous sections it has also been discussed that a branding system reproduces its own elements (the operations of the brander and brand user) in such a way that a generalized brand concept, structures and processes are (re) produced.

In this paragraph, we shift our focus to the brander. Not the branding system, but 'the brander' will be our focal system.

Figure 2.8 below shows the branding system as a system of recursively connected operations of brander and brand user. The brander and brand user are depicted as separate entities (the brander system and a collection of brand user's) within that branding system. The (re)production of the brander system is dependent on the contribution it makes to the (re) production of the branding system.

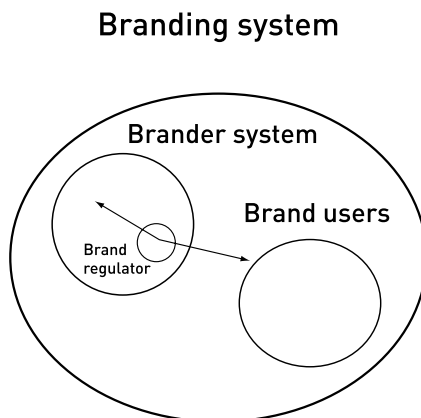


Figure 2.8 The brander system

Stated otherwise, the maintenance and development of the brander system depends on the positive contribution it makes to the branding system. At the same time, the maintenance and development of the branding system depends on the contribution the brander system makes to the branding system.

The brander system consists of all the operations performed by the brander and ascribed to the brand by brand users and (or) by the brander himself⁴³. These operations do not automatically make a positive contribution to the branding system. In order to do so, they have to be regulated in a particular way. The function of the brander system that performs these regulating operations is called the 'brand regulator'. The brand regulator is the function within the brander system that must ensure that the brander's operations make a positive contribution to the branding system. The operations of the brander must be regulated by the brand regulator in such a way that they can easily connect with the operations of the brander user. If such regulation is successful, the chances are increased that the operations of the brander and brand user become mutually connected and, thus, the branding system is maintained and developed.

In this section we will discuss the regulation of the brander system. Before discussing the dynamics and principles of regulation of the brander system, we will first investigate the essential variables of the brander system in relation to those of the branding system (2.7.2.). Secondly we

will discuss the nature of the normative brand concepts, used by the brand regulator in the regulation of the brander system (2.7.3.). Thirdly, we will discuss the other models that are used by the brand regulator for the regulation of the brander system (2.7.4). Finally, we will explain the way in which the brand regulator regulates the brander system (2.7.5).

2.7.2 *The essential variables of the brander system*

While the (re) production of the brander system is coupled to the (re) production of the branding system, the essential variables of the first are coupled with these of the latter. So, the essential variables of the brander system need to be related somehow to the requirements of maintaining (a) some shared generalized concept (b), sufficient structures and (c) processes.

In order to make a contribution to the branding system, the brander must contribute to the maintenance of a shared generalized brand concept. The brand regulator has to regulate the brander's operations in such way that they contribute to the shared generalized brand concept somehow. However, the brand regulator does not only regulate the brander's operations in order to confirm an *existing* (shared) generalized brand concept. It can have certain intentions or preferences with respect to what the generalized brand concept should stand for. It applies a normative model of the generalized brand concept for regulating the brander's operations, so that his operations are in line with his version of the shared generalized brand concept. Such a normative model can be considered as the *first essential variable* of the brander system. It reflects the brand concept as preferred by the brander. The brand regulator regulates the brander's operations in such way that they meet the features defined by some normative model of the generalized brand concept.

At the same time, there is a chance that, in due time, the brander's normative model of the brand concept will deviate from the shared generalized brand concept. If that is the case, the impact of the shared generalized brand concept is diminished and an essential variable of the *branding* system is threatened. So, the *second essential variable* of the brander system is that the normative brand concept used by the brand regulator, must be related to the shared generalized brand concept. Stated differently, the brand regulator has to make sure that his (normative) version of the generalized brand concept is recognizable with the shared generalized brand concept for brand users. To achieve this, it must compare two

kinds of models: his model of the generalized brand concept as he supposes it is shared by brander and brand user and his normative model of the generalized brand concept⁴⁴.

Finally, in order to make a contribution to the branding system the brand regulator has to consider the reactions of the brand user to these operations. The operations of the brand user must judge the operations by the brander positively. In that case, the operations of the brander and brand user stay connected and the branding system is reproduced. These positive reactions of the brand user lead – in the end – to the maintenance of existing structures and processes and the building of new ones. Stated otherwise, if the brander does not get or aims to get some positive reaction on his operations by the brand user, his operations can never become related to those of the brand user in some structured way, whether it be by structures or processes. Even so, the structure and processes of the branding system imply that the brander takes into account certain expected reactions of the brand user in the selection of his own operations. These are reactions he expects on the basis of previous communications or reactions he foresees on the basis of particular processes. So, the *third essential variable* for the brander system are the positive reactions by the brand user to the operations of the brander resulting in the (re) production of structures and processes.

In figure 2.9 below, we have depicted the relationship between the essential variables of the branding system on the one hand and the brander system on the other. As we see, both are coupled. The normative brand concept and its relation to the shared generalized brand concept – the first two essential variables of the brander system – are coupled to the shared generalized brand concept – an essential variable of the branding system. By ‘tuning’ the brander’s operations to the normative brand concept and by making sure that this normative brand concept is related to a shared generalized brand concept, the brand regulator can ensure that the operations of the brander make a positive contribution to some shared generalized brand concept. The reaction of the brand user to the operations of the brander – the third essential variable of the brander system – is coupled to the other essential variable of the branding system: the maintenance of certain structures and processes. The branding system could not build any structures or processes if the brand regulator would not be susceptible to the reaction of the brand user to the operations of the brander.

The normative brand concept will play an important role in our empirical cases. That is why we will discuss in the next paragraph the nature

of this concept by relating it to other ways of ‘self reference’ used by organizations.

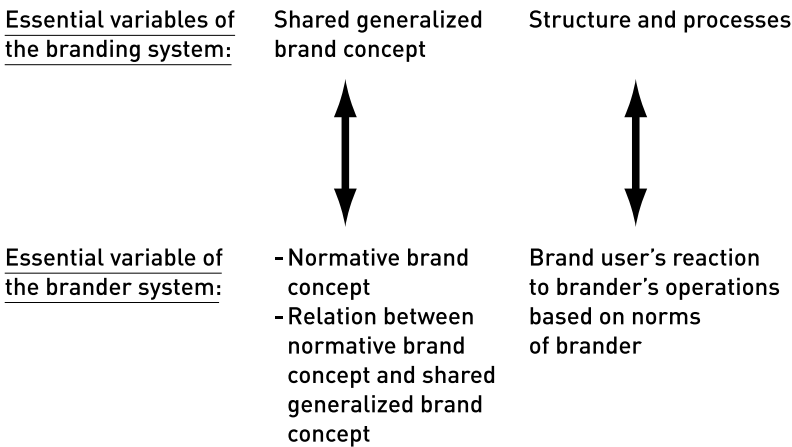


Figure 2.9 The essential variables of the brander system

2.7.3 The normative brand concept: the brand identity

Two of the three essential variables of the brander system concern the normative brand concept. This concept is elaborated extensively in branding literature under the name brand identity. In his book *Strategic Brand Management* (1992), J.N. Kapferer introduced the term brand identity. The brand identity can be seen as a normative brand concept produced by the brander, which is used to describe certain aspects of the shared generalized brand concept in an explicit way⁴⁵: “Identity is on the sender’s side. The sender’s duty is to specify the meaning, intention, and vocation of the brand (...) Before portraying an idea in the mind of the public, one should establish exactly what is to be portrayed (Kapferer, 1992: 37).” The brand identity is an *explicit, generalized, normative* brand concept. Especially because of its generalized character, the notion of brand identity has become popular in branding literature and practice. By its generalized character, the brand identity provided the ability to bind a variety of different (kinds of) products and services into one concept⁴⁶. The concept of the brand identity was a tool that explicitly and formally provided boundaries for new product development. It provided clarity about which operations or products were allowed from a branding point of view⁴⁷.

The brand identity is a generalized concept because it transcends the concrete products or services linked to the brand. In Kapferer's model of a brand identity, the generalized character is clearly illustrated:

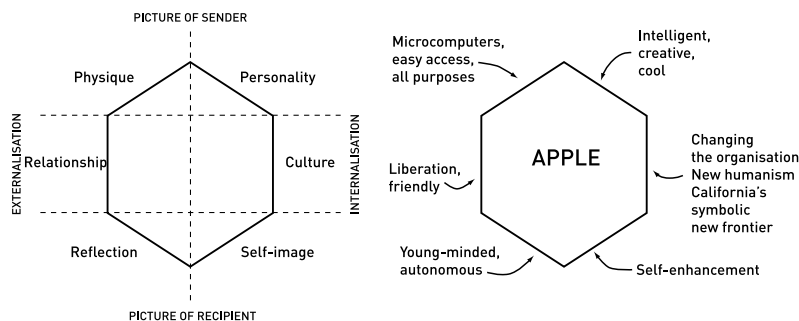


Figure 2.10 (brand identity model (Kapferer, 1992))

As figure 2.10 shows, the brand identity model by Kapferer makes different aspects of the brand explicit.

The brand identity is not 'just' a generalized concept, it refers to the essential characteristics of the brand as seen by the brander. As Kapferer argues: "The real question is not 'How is a brand seen?' but 'What is the brand, what is its basic uniqueness?' (1992:32)." Kapferer indicates that the brand identity can be captured by asking the following questions concerning a particular brand (1992: 34):

- What is its individuality?
- What are its long term goals and ambitions?
- What is its consistency?
- What are its values?
- What are its basic truths?
- What are its recognition signs?

As these questions show, the brand identity displays the unique and essential characteristics of the brand – as it is seen by the brander.⁴⁸

So, the brand identity is an *explicit generalized normative* brand concept that describes the brander's version of the shared generalized brand concept. It refers to and captures the *essential characteristics* of the brand. By doing so, it makes explicit certain aspects of the organization as well. It highlights those aspects of an organization that can be relevant in

the context of branding. According to Kapferer, the brand identity can make explicit organizational aspects, like organizational culture or values (1992: 44-46). Moreover, geographical roots of an organization of the brander can be a source of identity: "Certain brands draw their source of identity and their individuality from their geographical roots (1992: 65)." Aaker argues that a brand identity can make explicit much more aspects of the organization as a brand, such as the values, culture, people, programs, and assets/skills: "One answer is to base the brand identity in part on the organization behind the brand. The basic premise is that it takes an organization with a particular set of values, culture, people, programs, and assets/skills to deliver a product or service. These organizational characteristics can provide a basis for differentiation, a value proposition, and a customer relationship, as the stories of Saturn (..) and The Body Shop illustrate (1996: 115)." Just because various organizational aspects are being made explicit by the brand identity, the brand identity can be compared to a certain extent, to other 'reference points' that are used in strategic decision making of organizations.

Organizations can use different kinds of so called 'reference points' on the basis of which they make strategic choices. Based on a study of management schools and theories, Fiegenbaum, Hart & Schendel (1996) argue that these schools and theories all propose different kinds of reference points that can be used for organizational decision making: "Each perspective from literature described above appears to share one important theme in common: the selection of a benchmark or 'reference point' against which strategic choice or organizational behaviour is judged. However, each perspective deals with different content that might comprise a reference point and posits a different mechanism of comparison (1996: 222)." Different management schools propose different reference points management can use to make decisions.

One of them is the core competence approach⁴⁹. Like the brand identity, 'core competencies' are a reference point, a way of highlighting certain essential aspects of an organization with the purpose of regulating organisational operations (van der Vorst, 1997). 'Brand identity', however, is different from 'core competencies' in various respects. *First of all* it differs from 'core competencies' because it highlights other aspects of the organization. Core competencies are a reference point based on the assets and capabilities it possesses. It concentrates on the resources of an organization. 'Brand identity' is concentrated more on the output of the organization. *Secondly*, the identification of core competencies takes place

against the background of the competitive environment of an organization in particular: "A multitude of dangers await a company that can't *conceive of itself* and its competitors in core competence *terms* (Prahalad & Hamel, 1994: 221)." The brand identity is a reference point made against the background of potential users of organizational output. This can be illustrated by the fact that a 'brand identity' not only indicates the output of the organization, but also explicitly relates this output to their meaning for (potential) users. Moreover, 'brand identity' is explicit in the kind of stakeholders it wants to address. In Kapferer's description of the brand identity of Apple for instance (figure 2.10), the offers by Apple (microcomputers for all purposes) are related explicitly to what that means to whom ('liberation for young minded people'). Such descriptions or images of end users are not explicit parts of these 'core competencies descriptions'. Stated differently, the 'brand identity' has, more than 'core competencies', the function of laying down a context within which a relation between organisation and buyers can flourish (Mosmans & van der Vorst, 1998, 1999, 2000).

So, the 'brand identity' and 'core competencies' are different forms of reference points. However, both 'brand identity' and 'core competencies' can be of service to each other. The core competencies can be part of the brand identity providing a definition of the output of the organization. For instance, the way a company services its customers can be a core competence. As such, a core competence can be part of a brand identity representing the description of that capability as constituting part of the brand. Conversely, brands in themselves⁵⁰ can be considered as being part of the core competence: i.e. as an intangible asset of an organization (Hamel & Heene, 1994: 156). In that case the brand is part of a core competence description, representing one of the assets an organization possesses.

So, the brand identity can be considered as a particular reference point for organizational operations. The use of reference points in the form of an explicit model or description – like the brand identity – by the system in the process of regulation, is a crucial system function. It can be considered as a form of self description (Luhmann, 1984, 2000, 1997; Willke, 1993: 198-200). Self description is a specific form of self reference used by a social system, or more specifically an organization, to identify itself (Luhmann, 2000: 417). Self description is a way of self reference by which the system explicitly makes a description of itself that is used to determine

its identity and select operations. It displays the essence of a system and is used as a model for self selection. As Luhmann argues: "Das System reflektiert seine eigene Einheit als Bezugspunkt fuer Beobachtungen, als Ordnungsgesichtspunkt fuer ein laufendes Reflektieren und dann empfiehlt es sich, Texte anzufertigen, die eine Vielzahl solcher immer nur ereignishafter und situationsgebundener Selbstbeobachtungen koordinieren. In einfachster Form gibt das System sich einen Namen, eine rigide invariante Bezeichnung, die eben wegen dieser Rigidität wiederholt und in unvorherbar verschiedenen Situationen verwendet werden kann (1997: 880).

For the existence of the brander system, it is crucial that it applies a self description that helps it to reflect. A self description indicates something (the organisation) it belongs to itself. It marks out some specific aspects of the organization that are considered as essential: "Die Besonderheit dieses Begriffsbereichs liegt darin, dass die Operation der Referenz in das von ihr Bezeichnete eingeschlossen ist. Sie bezeichnet etwas, dem sie selbst zugehört (Luhmann, 1984: 600-601)." It can be used as reference point for organizational operations. The use of it excludes the operations not contributing to that essence and includes those that do contribute to that. As such, it can be used as a way of making selections. The brand as a concept – or in Luhmann's terms self description – accentuates particular things in the world. It selects certain and at the same time hides other aspects. It marks particular 'things' that should play a role in communication and excludes others. By using the brand identity as a form of self description the selection of organizational operations by the organization takes place on the basis of a description of itself in terms of a brand.

In this paragraph, we have compared our notion of the generalized normative brand concept with the notion of brand identity and concluded that these refer to the same instrument. The brand identity (the normative brand concept) is a description *by* the brander system *of* itself (as such, it is a form of self description) in the context of the branding system. It is selected to make selections and regulate its operations: based on the specific brand identity some brander's operations are allowed as systems operations and others are rejected. As such, it plays an important role in the constitution of the brander system: it helps the brander system to make selections and by doing so it (re) produces the brander system.

In pursue of this thesis, the terms brand identity and normative brand concept will be used at random to indicate this same instrument.

2.7.4 Other models used for regulation by the brand regulator

In the process of regulation, the brand regulator uses several models. It cannot confine himself to applying a normative model of the shared generalized brand concept alone. Based on cybernetics, we can distinguish five kinds of models that can be used by the brand regulator in the process of regulation. In the best cases, the brand regulator uses all of these:

1 *Models that describe the complex of the branding system and the brander system*

The brand regulator uses models that describe both the branding system and the brander system in terms of its structures and processes. These reflect the (history) of operations of both systems; i.e. the coupled operations of brander and brand user (branding system).

2 *Models that describe the environment of the branding system and the brander system*

Since the brand regulator can apply models of two kinds of systems (the branding system and brander system), it can construct again two kinds of models reflecting the environment of a system:

- a model describing the environment of the branding system. This is a model describing the operations of competing branding systems, other stakeholders etc.
- a model that describes the environment of the brander system. This concerns for instance the operations of the brand user (especially those that do not belong to the branding system) and the operations by the brander that do not belong to the brander system

3 *Models that describe the essential variables of both systems*

These concern again two kinds of models, that are pictured in figure 2.13:

- a model of the essential variables of the brander system
- a model of the essential variables of the branding system

4 *Models that describe the dangers confronting both systems*

Again, there are two models that can be used, a). reflecting the internal dangers to the stability of a system (those stemming from the system itself) and b). the external dangers or disturbances (those stemming from

the environment of the system) that threaten the stability of the system:

- a model of the (potential internal and external) dangers to the branding system.
- a model of the (potential internal and external) dangers to the brander system

5 *Models that describe the successful and unsuccessful actions*

These models contain earlier experiences of the brand regulator with dangers. It describes these dangers as well as successful and less successful reaction patterns to these dangers. The existence of these models enables the brand regulator to learn from earlier experiences.

These models help the brand regulator to spot dangers and possibilities in an early stage, to assess the right direction for the brander's operations, to monitor whether the essential variables are threatened.

Knowing the essential variables of the brander system, the normative brand concept and the other models used by the brand regulator, we can discuss the regulation of the brander system by the brand regulator below.

2.7.5 *The regulation of the brander system*

In an optimal situation, the brand regulator regulates the brander's operations in such way that the essential variables are not crossed, i.e. they are regulated in such way that they reflect the brand regulator's own normative model of the shared generalized brand concept (the brand identity) – which is sufficiently related to that shared generalized concept – and provoke a positive reaction on the part of the brand user. However, due to both internal dangers and disturbances from the environment, the brander's operations are threatened to go 'out of direction'. Product developers of the brander, for instance, might propose new products that do not fit with the brand regulator's brand identity (van der Vorst, 2002). Possible dangers can also stem from the environment of the brander system, which we will call disturbances. The brand user might display a negative reaction to the operations of the brander, which alerts the brand regulator to perform proper regulation. Imagine that the dangers become too threatening to the brander system and the essential variables are threatened. This can occur in three cases:

- the brander's operations do not reflect the brand identity

- the brand identity used by the brand regulator deviates from the shared generalized brand concept
- the brand user's reactions to these operations are negative.

In those cases in which the essential variables are threatened, the brand regulator has three options for regulation:

- 1 by one feedback loop between the regulating function and its direct relevant environment. The regulation of the brander's operations takes place *given* a mode of behaviour and *given* (the admitted values of) the essential variables.
- 2 by a feedback loop that goes via the essential variables, while preserving the same essential variables. The brander system is regulated by means of a *change* in a mode of behaviour *given* (the admitted values of) the essential variables
- 3 by a feedback loop that goes via the essential variables, while the essential variables are changed. In this last case, regulation of the brander system is performed by means of a *change* in the (admitted values of) the essential variables.

We will discuss these three possible ways of regulation below,

Ad. 1 The first feedback loop

There is a continuous 'interaction' between the brander system and its direct relevant environment, without a threat of the essential variables. This direct relevant environment concerns the operations of the brand user. At some point, the brand regulator might notice that new product proposals are not in line with the brand identity. This directly threatens the first essential variable. The challenge for the brand regulator is to regulate the brander's operations in such a way that new products that are introduced are in line with the brand identity. This threat can be solved in direct interaction between the brand regulator and the environment of the brander system. In this feedback loop, the brand regulator uses a form of regulation in which it does not change the mode of behaviour.

In section 2.4.3., we argued that a mode of behaviour of the branding system is defined by the means or concept of communication used by the brander and brand user. In case of the regulation of the brander system, a new mode of behaviour refers to changes with respect to the means and the concept behind communication. The brand regulator applies the same

mode of behaviour if the brander operations use the same concepts and same means for communication⁵¹.

Let's return to our example of the brander system under threat. The first essential variable is threatened – the fact that the brander's operations should match the brand identity. For instance, the brand regulator might be confronted with the proposal of a new product that does not match with his brand identity. In the first feedback loop, the danger is resolved by a constant interaction between the brand regulator and the product developers of the brand, so that the operations of the brander are adapted without changing the mode of behaviour. The brand regulator might stop the product developers and warns them never to propose such products again.

The second essential variable of the brander system can be threatened as well. Suppose that the brander has launched an advertising campaign that threatens the correspondence between the brand identity and the shared generalized brand concept. The brand regulator might be confronted with ads that contrast noticeably from the shared generalized brand concept. For instance, the brand regulator of Camel Tobacco is confronted with a campaign featuring Joe Camel – a more feminine, fun oriented campaign that does not fit with the shared generalized brand concept of a masculine macho man. Presuming that the campaign will be reflected by the brand identity – the first essential variable is met –, the launch of the campaign threaten the correspondence between that brand identity – more feminine and fun – on the one hand and the shared generalized brand concept – more masculine and macho – on the other. However, the brand regulator can still neutralize this threat without changing his mode of behaviour. For instance, it could stop the campaign or continue with it in the hope that it will change the perception of the shared generalized brand concept.

If the last essential variable is under threat, the brand user does not respond properly to the actions of the brander, for instance to a new promotional campaign. In reaction to a negative response to this promotional campaign, the brand regulator might decide to confront brand users with the promotion campaign at a different time. Or, the brand regulator might just continue with the campaign perceiving that the reaction of the brand user to the promotional campaign turns out to be positive after a while. As such, the threat to the essential variable is blocked by the brand regulator without changing its mode of behaviour (neither the means of communication nor the concept behind his operations has changed).

Ad. 2 The second feedback loop

Suppose that the product developers are still proposing new products which do not match the brand identity. The threat cannot be taken away by performing regulating actions via the first feedback loop; i.e. the brand regulator cannot stop them in immediate interaction. In that case, it can change its mode of behaviour. As we discussed earlier, this change in mode of behaviour takes place by mediation of a gating mechanism, and a step mechanism. If the first feedback loop does not succeed (the interaction between brand regulator and the operations of the brand user or the product or campaign developer) the essential variables remain threatened. In this case, the step mechanism is triggered so that the system has to perform another mode of behaviour. This means that the operations of the brander are communicated via new means or based on a new communication concept. Such a new mode of behaviour is based on a different value of the step mechanism. It is the gating mechanism that triggers these changes and determines which mode of behaviour is triggered by the step mechanism. For instance, it might change the concepts added to the products in such a way that they do fit with that brand identity. Again, these new modes of behaviour can be chosen by using the gating mechanism: because of earlier experiences with such situations.

Secondly, suppose that the advertising campaign of Joe Camel is not accepted because of the fact that it is based on a brand identity that deviates severely from the shared generalized brand concept. If such a threat of the second essential variable is not solved in direct interaction between the brander and the brand users, the brand regulator can a). use a different campaign based on a different communication concept or b). introduce new products (launch a product as a new means of communication) so that the shared generalized concept is changed in favour of the brand identity.

Finally, the attempts to solve the threat to the third essential variable can fail. In reaction to a bad response to a promotional campaign, the brand regulator of the brander system might then set a new mode of behaviour by lowering prices. This reaction (lowering prices) is a new means of communication (and therefore a new mode of behaviour) triggered by the brand regulator in the hope that it will lead to a better reaction of brand users, i.e. giving a sales boost to the brand's products. It might be inspired by earlier experiences that the brand regulator has had with negative reactions. Via the gating mechanism the brander system benefits from experiences with these previous adaptations.

All in all, in this feedback loop, new modes of behaviour are triggered by the regulator of the brander system, while preserving the same essential variables.

Ad. 3 The third feedback loop

The variants in behaviour performed in the second feedback loop described above are performed without a change of the values of the essential variables: the operations of the brander still reflect the brand identity, the brand identity is related to the shared generalized brand concept in exactly the same way and the brander's operations provoke reactions with the brand user that are within acceptable limits. However, if the brander system does not succeed in blocking the dangers by changing his mode of behaviour, the last regulating mechanism that can be used by the brand regulator is changing the values of the essential variables themselves. The brand regulator can choose to make changes to the values of the essential variables, i.e. change a particular brand identity, change the norms for how the brand identity is related to the shared generalized brand concept or change the norms for a positive reaction.

With respect to the first essential variable of the brander system, the brand regulator reacts to disturbances by applying a new brand identity. For instance, if the products proposed by the product developers are perceived to have a great potential, the brand regulator can decide to change the brand identity and introduce new products based on this new brand concept.

If the correspondence between the brand identity and the shared generalized brand concept is so weak that the values of the essential variables of the brander system are threatened, the brand regulator can adapt these. That means that it applies a different norm for the degree to which the brand identity and the generalized brand concept should be related. However, this norm cannot be changed infinitely. There are boundaries to the degree to which a brand identity can differ from the shared generalized brand concept. A severe discrepancy between the two will lead to misunderstanding between the brander and brand users, which will – in the end – hinder the interaction process.

Finally, in reaction to a particular dangerous situation, the brand regulator can change the essential variables in order to maintain the viability of the brander system. With respect to the third essential variable, it could imply that a new level of tolerance is found in which the reactions of the brand user to the brander's operations are considered as acceptable.

For instance, if the promotion campaign of the brander does not succeed and the new modes of behaviour by the brand regulator are not accepted (for instance, lowering prices via the second feedback loop), the brand regulator can decide to be content with a different amount of interactions with the brand user. A reason for this could lie in the fact that the average norm in a particular market has changed dramatically. A good example of this is the market for mobile telecommunications. After a few years of explosion in terms of market penetration, the market becomes more saturated. That means that the tolerance levels for a positive reaction to promotions will have to be adjusted because of a declining base of potential new users.

If the brander's operations based on a new brand identity, new norms for the relation between the brand identity and the shared generalized brand concept and these new 'reactions values' are accepted, a new stable situation can be created. If the mode of behaviour does not work, the step mechanism has to change again and again, or the branding system will disintegrate eventually.

Again, a brand regulator might have a memory (the gating mechanism) in which previous adaptations are stored. If the situation occurs in which particular adaptations have been proved appropriate, they can be triggered by the gating mechanism once a comparable situation occurs again. Such a memory function makes it possible for the brand regulator to regulate proactively. The memory function of the brand regulator enables it to develop best practices and perform or construct regulating actions with less danger. For instance, a brand regulator might foresee particular cultural changes that might affect brand preferences in the near future and conclude that the normative brand concept should be adapted.

In this paragraph we describe the different forms of regulation that can be applied by the brander in the regulation of the brander system⁵². In the next section, we will discuss the regulation of the brander system against the background of a specific problem, the contingency problem.

2.8 The use of the brand identity in the process of brand regulation: variety and specificity

2.8.1 Brand regulation against the background of increased variety

The brand identity plays an important role in the regulation of the brander system. To preserve the viability of the brander system the brand regulator must make sure that a) the brand regulator regulates the brander's operations in such way that they meet the features defined by the brand identity and b) the brand identity does not deviate too much from the shared generalized brand concept.

Since it has such an important role in the regulation of the brander system, let's have a closer look on the way the brand identity is used for regulation when the pressure on the brander system increases. As figure 2.11 illustrates, there are two directions from which the variety pressure can increase:

- 1 Variety pressure by the brand user: the brand user asks for new products or services to be introduced by the brand or imposes a different meaning on the brand.
- 2 Variety pressure by the brander: the brander proposes new products, services or meanings to be attached to the brand

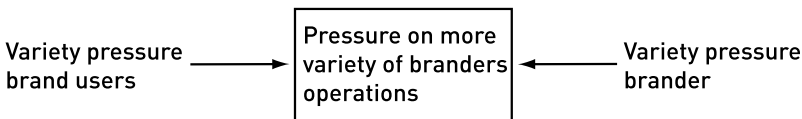


Figure 2.11 Increased variety pressure on the brander system

The variety pressure can force the brander system to increase its variety of operations. The brand regulator that is confronted with a need to increase the variety of the brander's operations and that wants to keep these operations within the boundaries defined by the brand identity (i.e. meet the first essential variable) is forced to apply a brand identity that can absorb more variety. The increased variety of the brander's operations has to be 'covered' by the brand identity. However, the need to absorb more variety can *threaten* the other two essential variables.

First of all, the absorption of variety based on the brand identity can

make this same brand identity more general. However, the need for a more general (or adapted) brand identity (provoked by the increased variety pressure and based on the need to meet the first essential variable) must go hand in hand with the demand not to deviate too much from the shared generalized brand concept (the third essential variable). Under the influence of the increased variety pressure and the demand to keep the operations in line with the brand identity, the brand regulator can be inclined to adapt the brand identity. However, to meet the third essential variable the brand identity must stay specifically related to the shared generalized brand concept.

Secondly, the need for a more general brand identity can threaten a positive reaction of the brand user to the brander's operations in the long run. The possible negative impact of variety on the specificity of a brand has gained attention in branding literature under the name 'the dilution effect'. This effect was first issued by Ries & Trout (1998: 103). In their opinion, new products under some brand name (variety) makes a brand more general (less specific). According to them, these new products: "blur the image of the brand in the mind of the consumer (1998: 103)."

This effect is studied by other authors⁵³. As Dacin & Smith (1994) illustrate: "For example, the Honda name originally was associated with motorcycles but later extended to automobiles. At this point, in categorizing the new product with the existing product, consumers likely assigned a somewhat more abstract meaning to the brand, say 'motorized transportation vehicles. Currently, the Honda name also appears on a line of lawn or garden tools as well as small gasoline-powered generators. The meaning of the brand continues to undergo transformations as new products are connected to the brand. In making sense of this new constellation of products, consumers may abstract the meaning of Honda to 'a company that manufactures formed metal products that use gasoline engines (1994: 212)."

As the quote illustrates, a more general brand concept 'a company that manufactures formed metal products that use gasoline engines' allows more variety (motorcycles, automobiles, garden tool, gasoline-powered generators). The concept is being made more general. The possibility of a brand identity becoming more general under the influence of new products linked to the brand is not without danger. A more general brand identity eventually can lead to brander's operations that reflect a more general idea of the brand. The more diffuse these brander's operations based on such general idea, the less its ability to help the brand user and

the product developers to make choices. The ability of the brand to reduce the contingency problem for (potential) brand users is diluted when the expectations of a brand become less 'specific'. This because the more general the expectations tied to the brand, the more difficult it becomes to differentiate the brand from other brands. So, the operations of the brander that are based on a very general brand identity applied by the brand regulator, can lead to less positive reactions by the brand user.

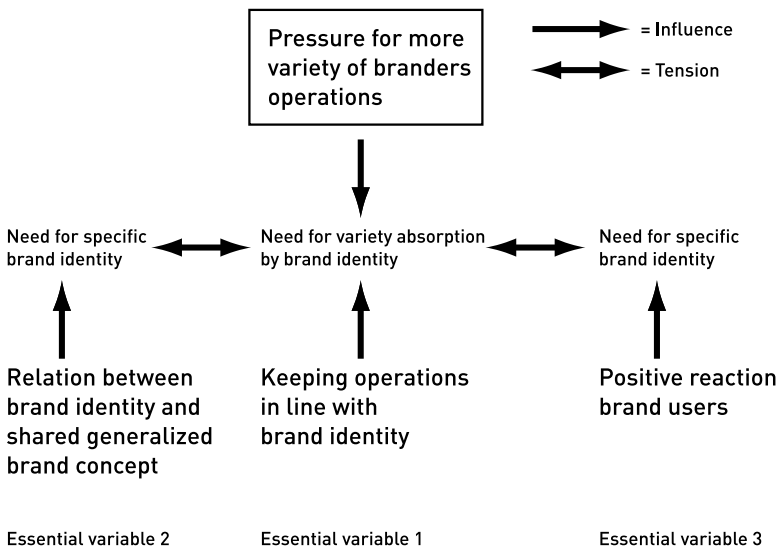


Figure 2.12 Possible contradicting demands on the brand identity

In other words, in order to keep a greater variety of operations in line with the brand identity (meet the first essential variable), the brand identity must absorb more variety. Thus, the brand regulator is confronted with a dilemma. On the one hand, the brand identity must absorb more variety. On the other hand, it must stay specific in order to stay related to the shared generalized brand concept (i.e. meet the second essential variable) and arouse a positive reaction of the brand user in the long run (i.e. meet the third essential variable). Apparently, if the brander system is confronted with an increase in variety, the regulation of the brander system is connected with a potential tension between allowing the brand identity to absorb variety and at the same time preserving a specific meaning. The brander will be inclined to let the brand identity

absorb variety in order to deal with his own contingency, but at the same time is forced to keep it specific in order to minimize the negative consequences of the brand user's contingency problem. As these principles indicate, the regulation of the brander system can be considered as a constant dealing with the dilemma between two possible ambitions of the brand regulator: the ambition to increase variety and specificity of the brand identity. The striving of these two ambitions also reflects a possible tension between the one essential variable and the other two essential variables of the brander system: the tension between broadening the brand identity on the one hand (so that variety can be absorbed) and preserve its specificity on the other (so that the relation between the brand identity and the shared generalized concept is not threatened and its ability to generate positive reactions is not weakened).

In the next section, we will translate these tensions in concrete research questions, which will form a basis for our empirical investigation.

2.8.2 Analysing the stabilization of the brander system: an empirical enquiry

In the previous section, we described the dilemma the brand regulator is confronted with when the variety pressure on the brander system increases. Our empirical investigation will focus on the way the brand regulator deals with this dilemma. It will be focused on the consequences of the increased variety pressure on the ability of a brand regulator to keep the brander's operations in line with the brand identity (see figure 2.12). On the one hand, this variety cannot be ignored, on the other hand the brand identity must stay specific and specifically related to the shared generalized brand concept. In most cases, the brand regulator already uses a certain brand identity, which is threatened by the increased variety pressure. Since we are interested primarily in the way branders deal with increased variety pressure, our focus in the empirical investigation lies on how regulation takes place, given a certain existing brand identity against the background of increased variety pressure. The analysis of the other essential variables (the relation between the brand identity and the shared generalized brand concept on the one hand and the ability to generate positive reactions on the other) will serve as a background of that investigation. That means that we will analyse the influence that these two essential variables with respect to their influence on the need for the brand identity to stay specific.

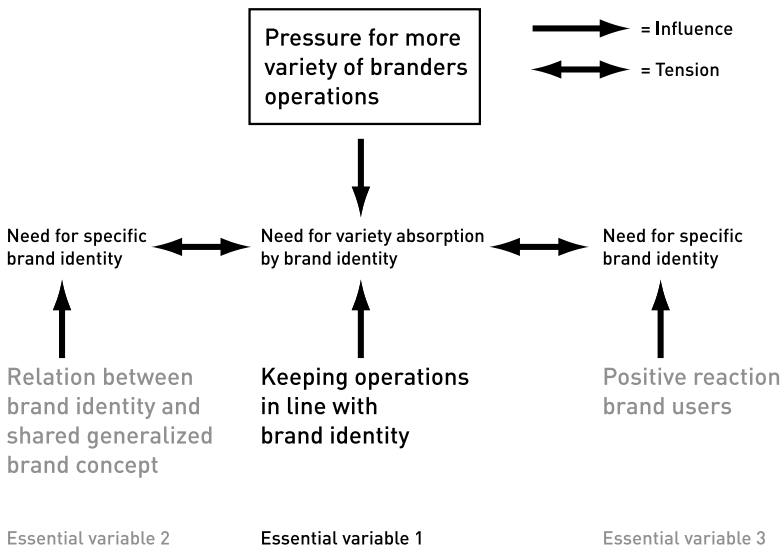


Figure 2.13 Our research focus

The increased variety will be investigated by looking how these brands deal with new product proposals. Based on our observations in the previous sections, we argue that the ability of the brand regulator to deal with this depends on two things: the characteristics of the brand identity itself and the regulating abilities by the brand regulator.

The characteristics of the brand identity

Brand identities can differ in their ability to absorb variety. More in particular, some brand identities will be better able to *absorb variety without losing specificity* at the same time, then others. These inherent characteristics of a brand identity will be object of our investigation. So, it will be necessary not only to investigate differences in the ability of brand identities to absorb a variety of products, but also to examine the differences in the chance that these identities lose specificity under the pressure of increasing variety.

The regulating abilities of the brand regulator

As we described in section 2.7., the brand regulator has different regulating options. Specified for our investigation these regulating options can be redefined as follows:

- The variety is blocked by the brand regulator by performing regulating actions within the *same* mode of behaviour. For instance, the brand regulator rejects the products that are proposed by product developers
- The brand regulator performs regulating actions within a *new* mode of behaviour, while keeping the *same* values of the essential variables (i.e. the same brand identity). For instance, the brand regulator chooses a new means of communication.
- The brand regulator performs regulating actions by *changing* the essential variables. For instance, a new mode of behaviour is triggered, based on a new the brand identity.

In chapter 5, these regulating options will be elaborated further so that we will be able to identify the differences between brand regulators with respect to their regulating abilities in the empirical investigation of the cases.

So, the object of our empirical investigation is the brand regulator performing regulating actions in reaction to increased (product) variety pressure so that he allows the brand identity to absorb variety and stays specific at the same time.

We now can specify our research objective and questions:

Research objectives:

- Investigate the difference in the abilities between branders to keep their operations in line with the brand identity against the background of increased variety pressure. That means, against the background of the need to incorporate more variety and yet make the brand identity not too general and specifically related to the shared generalized brand concept.
- Investigate whether a cybernetic theory on brands together with a further elaboration of a theory on concepts can provide a deeper insight in these differences.

Research questions:

- 1 Which are the differences in the ways in which different brand regulators manage to stabilize the brander system against the background of increased variety pressure? There are two kinds of differences in particular we will address:
 - 1a Differences in the ability of the brand identity to absorb a variety of products while staying specific at the same time. First of all, this implies an analysis of the differences between brand identities with respect to the kind of variety they are open to. Secondly, this means an analysis of the differences between brand identities with respect to the risk they have of losing specificity under influence of absorbing variety.
 - 1b Differences in the way brand regulators perform regulating actions. The different regulating options described above can shed a light on the way the brand regulator regulates the branding system under increased variety pressure. More in particular, we are interested whether differences in the way in which brand regulators perform regulating actions are related to differences in the ability of brand identities to stay specific against the background of increased variety pressure (1a).
- 2 How can theoretical notions on systems theory and concepts be applied to investigate this dilemma?

The system theoretical notions applied in this chapter to branding not only set the scene for the way we treat brand management. Their descriptive and explanatory force also will be tested by empirical research. It will be investigated whether the regulating options described above can be found in the case studies and whether they are relevant in order to understand branding practice in general and the way the brand regulator deals with the variety-specificity dilemma in particular.

Before we will be able to do so, we will have to study concepts in greater depth and try to provide a model to analyse them. Although we have discussed concepts in this chapter, this discussion does not allow us to study them in practice. For that, we not only have to investigate their nature and properties more closely, but also need to know how these more general insights on concepts can be applied to branding. In chapter 4 and 5 we will develop a research framework to analyse the conceptual structure of the normative brand concept. This framework will be used to

investigate the variety-specificity dilemma. At the same time, the empirical investigation will be used to test whether the framework is a relevant tool for brand analysis in general and such an investigation particular.

So, since an important part of our research framework is based on analysing the brand as a concept, we will first of all discuss the nature of 'concepts' in greater depth in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

Categories, concepts and cognitive models

“Rule one: Concepts are connected by analogy. There is no way to decide at once whether an analogy is good or bad, because to some degree everything is connected to everything else. For example, potato crosses with apple, because both are vegetable and round in shape. From apple to snake, by Biblical association. From snake to doughnut, by formal likeness. From doughnut to life preserver, and from life preserver to bathing suit, than bathing to sea, sea to ship, ship to shit, shit to toilet paper, toilet to cologne, cologne to alcohol, alcohol to drugs, drugs to syringe, syringe to hole, hole to ground, ground to potato.”

Koolhaas, 1995, xxii

3.1 Introduction

In our theoretical framework, the brand and the branding system are considered as two constituent parts of branding that are mutually dependent. The brand is considered as a concept. As a shared generalized concept, the brand plays a crucial role in the stabilization of the branding system. As an explicit normative concept, it is used as an essential variable in the regulating operations of the brander system. In our empirical investigation, we will focus on the brand as an explicit normative brand concept, or brand identity. More in particular, a large part of our empirical research will regard the differences between various brand identities in their ability to absorb variety while staying specific at the same time.

The differences between branders in dealing with the variety-specificity dilemma can be partly ascribed to the qualities of the normative brand concept they apply. Concepts determine what can be put together by building one category. Consequently, it is crucial to investigate the abilities of a brand to comprise a variety of products or services.

When brands are essentially 'grouping mechanisms' able to comprise a variety of 'things', a *first step* in understanding the nature of brands is to explore the 'act of grouping'; i.e. categorization. Therefore we will start this chapter with an investigation of the process of categorization. One of the fundamental questions about categorization is concerned with the nature of the categories themselves. This pertains to the question whether categories are formed by the 'qualities' of the objects they comprise or by the 'qualities' of the categorizer. More specifically: is the grouping of products established by the brand Body Shop a 'result' of the qualities of these products or a product of the categorizing behaviour of the brander? The *second step* in understanding the 'encompassing ability' of a brand is to understand the principles behind categorization. This will bring us to the notion of concepts. Concepts provide structuring rules that drive categorization. The *third step* to understand the way a brand can 'group things together', therefore, is to understand the structure of a concept. The structure of a concept is the key to unravel the categorization rules provided by a concept. This concerns the way the concept is structured internally (if it is a complex concept), or the way it is related to other concepts within a particular network of concepts. We will call a specific network of (sub)concepts an Idealized Cognitive Model (ICM).

In other words, this section will be concerned with three steps to understand the abilities of a (brand) concept to categorize: 'the nature of categorization', 'concepts' and 'cognitive models'. In section 3.2, we will discuss categorization and relate the variety – specificity dilemma to categories. In section 3.3 we will shift our focus of attention to concepts. In section 3.4 we will analyse the structure of ICMs. Section 3.5. will deal with different types of ICMs, which are different ways of structuring a network of concepts.

3.2 Categorization

Baudrillard's vision on the brand, discussed in the first chapter, emphasizes the particular ability of a brand to bind 'things'⁵⁴ together. As he argues, a brand 'imposes a coherent vision', thereby comprising a variety of 'things', like products, shops, advertisements. In this process certain differences are neglected. This principle of imposing an equivalence on 'things' – making them appear as being similar in some way or another –

relates to our basic ability to group 'things' together. It refers to the ability to categorize, which will be discussed in this section.

Categorization is basic to human thought and several scientific disciplines⁵⁵ have shed a light on this subject. We will focus on linguistics and cognitive psychology. We use linguistics to provide insight in the way the variety – specificity dilemma is dealt with in linguistic categories. Cognitive psychology is used as a source for our thinking because it provides insights that can be used for building tools for our empirical research. We will see that the notions we use from these two different scientific traditions – linguistics and psychology – are build on the same theoretical premises.

Categorization is basic to our thought, perception, action and speech (Lakoff, 1987: 5; Neisser, 1987). Every time we see 'something' as a kind of 'thing', we are categorizing. Every time we think of something as a particular kind of 'thing', we are employing categories. Every time we perform any kind of action, like washing our clothes, riding our bike, we are using categories because we are treating these as a kind of 'thing'. We deploy hundreds of kinds of categories, categories of objects, of activities, of words, phrases. A lot of 'things' we categorize are not physical 'things', but can comprise events, states or emotions as well. By doing so, we pretend these 'things' to be the same: "...to categorize is to treat a set of things as somehow equivalent: to put them in the same pile, or to call them by the same name, or to respond to them in the same way." (Neisser, 1987: 1).

Most categorization is automatic and unconscious. If we become aware of it at all, it is often because some problematic situation occurs. In moving around in the world, we automatically categorize people, animals, trees, buildings etc. This may lead to the impression that we categorize things as they are, that they come only in 'natural kinds'. It might suggest that the forming of categories is not driven by mind, but by the characteristics of 'things' in the world.

The drivers behind a particular grouping of 'things' established by categorization have been subject to linguistic, psychological as well as philosophical research. These traditions all have provided answers to the question of how categories relate to our experience of the world. With respect to linguistic categories, Ellis (1993: 29) has suggested that there are two possible answers to this question: "One would be to say that situations are grouped as they are because of their real similarity: in spite of

small differences they can share certain characteristic features. The other would be to say that, for the purpose of the speakers of this language, all the situations categorized in a certain way (by the use of a certain word) are treated by those speakers in the same way, that is, *as if there were no difference between them*." In other words, is the similarity imposed upon 'things' by a category driven by the physical qualities of these 'things' or by the qualities of the categorizer?

Ellis chooses the second position, because it can provide a proper framework for the first, while the reverse is not possible. The first position works for some cases but it won't work for others. The second can deal with all cases. In order to prove his position, he redefines the problem in proving two things. According to Ellis the issue is: "(1) whether a *particular* set of similarities that may exist among certain creatures (or any other phenomena) is sufficient in itself to dictate and justify the categories of a language, and (2) whether it is necessary for a category to be based primarily upon such similarities at all. It is not difficult to show that the answer to both questions must be negative (1993: 30)."

As for *the second*, Ellis shows that it is easy to disprove. There are lots of categories that group things together that do not share physical properties. It is not necessary for a category to be based primarily upon similarities at all. Words like food, vehicles, poison, are all categories that do not share physical properties. As Ellis (1993: 31) argues: "Food items have no defining physical characteristic other than that they are useful to eat". And... "a table is not defined as anything that measures x by y inches but rather as something that affords a useful surface." What makes us sort objects into the category 'table' are not the physical properties of the object, but the fact that we somehow have similar experiences with that object. In Ellis' words, objects are grouped by functional equivalence: "the equivalence created by the categories of a language is a functional one: those things included in a category can be and are treated as equivalent for the purpose of the category even though they are not identical (1993: 34)." Linguistic categories are primarily the reflection of the collective purposes of the speakers of a language, rather than a direct reflection of the structure of the world.

The first point is a bit more difficult to prove. Ellis does not deny that there are similarities between 'things' in the natural world. However, these similarities cannot be the unique basis of the categories of language because there are far too many of them. Different languages employ different distinctions based on particular similarities: "Take rabbit: does it

simply recognize a natural kind, a neat division in the natural world that has nothing to do with our language? English recognizes the distinction between rabbits and hares. Is it natural too, or should we instead adopt as “natural” the system of those languages that treat both as rabbits, that is, jackrabbits, bush rabbits, and so on? Ellis: 1993: 32).” So, as Ellis shows, the existence of particular similarities among phenomena is not sufficient in itself to dictate and justify the fact that different languages employ different categorizations. If the similarities in itself were sufficient enough, different languages would not employ different categories.

So, Ellis ascribes the nature of linguistic categories to the purposes of the speakers of the language. With this view he can handle all cases equally well. From the perspective of the first position it is impossible to deal with words that are rather evaluative. A category like ‘good’ is a rather evaluative category that reflects a grouping of objects which membership cannot be understood by looking for physical similarities between objects. It is the function that defines category membership. However, by ascribing the equivalence imposed by categories to the function or purposes it fulfils for the categorizer, it is still possible to accept that the purposes served by them are sometimes more and sometimes less focussed upon particular physical properties.

So, accepting Ellis’ position, we understand categorization as the process of grouping ‘things’ together by attributing equivalence to them. It is foremost a process of the human mind. By using categories, we group things together and exclude others from belonging to that group: “through categorization a *working* equivalence is established for a particular set of cases, and this equivalence in turn establishes a working difference between those sets of cases and other sets of cases-not just any kind of difference, but the categorical difference established by the sets of categories (Ellis, 1993: 30).”

Consequently, we can gain more insight in the working of categories by analysing the principles by which such ‘working equivalence’ is established. In other words, what is the source of equivalence that is responsible for the fact that some ‘things’ are considered to belong to a category while others are excluded? From Ellis’ perspective, the nature of the equivalence established by a category is determined by the categorizer. The choice for membership of a category does not necessarily depend on the actual similarities of the things that are grouped together; it depends on the purpose of the speaker. The nature of equivalence lies in the experiences of the categorizer with ‘things’; in the function these ‘things’

have for him. Following Ellis, categorization is based on the purposes the categorizer is pursuing and the function 'things' have for him. In consequence, the 'things' that are grouped together into a category can show a great variety as to the physical features they have.

Although Ellis notions provide a fruitful introduction to a basic aspect of categorization, his treatment is limited to linguistic categories. An author who has addressed this issue very generally from a cognitive psychological point of view is Lakoff (1987). He considers categorization as a subject concerning human thought in general. He discusses categorization theory in a broader perspective by asking: "Do meaningful thought and reason concern merely the manipulation of abstract symbols and their correspondence to an objective reality Or do meaningful thought and reason essentially concern the nature of the organism doing the thinking – including the nature of his body, its interactions in its environment, its social character, and so on? (1987: xv-xvi)."

Lakoff holds a similar position on the subject as does Ellis from a linguistic point of view. As he argues (1987: xiii): "Cognitive science is now in transition. The traditional view is hanging on, although the new view is beginning to take hold. Categorization is a central issue. The traditional view is tied to the classical theory that categories are defined in terms of common properties of their members. But a wealth of new data on categorization appears to contradict the traditional view of categories." In contrast with what he calls the 'objectivistic view', Lakoff's theory on categorization is grounded in a theory on concepts, playing a major part in the constitution of categories: "Thought is embodied, that is, the structures used to put together our conceptual systems grow out of bodily experience and make sense in terms of it; moreover, the core of our conceptual systems is directly grounded in perception, body movement, and experience of a physical and social character (1987: xiii)." According to Lakoff, categories do not represent reality as it is, but categorization is grounded in the basis human capacity to conceptualize. In Lakoff's view, concepts are not found objectively in nature, but are a result of the human imaginative capacity. Moreover, the construction and use of concepts are a consequence of the nature of human biological capacities and of the experience of functioning in a physical and social environment.

In other words, accepting the position of Ellis and Lakoff, we will have to turn our focus to the categorizer for an understanding of the 'comprising abilities' of categories. Because 'how things' are grouped into a category depends on his or her purposes, experiences and conceptual or imaginative abilities.

On the basis of the discussion in this section we can conclude that the nature of the variety captured by categorizations, is based on the particular source of equivalence used by the categorizer. To understand the relationship between the ‘things’ a categorizer might allow, we have to turn our focus to the principles a categorizer is applying in this ‘ordering process’. Our focus of attention shifts from understanding the *grouping of ‘things’* itself by understanding *the way in which these particular ways of grouping are established by the categorizer*. This shift can be characterized as a shift from categories (particular grouping of “things”) to concepts (particular ideas or notions by which an ‘intelligence’ is able to understand an aspect of the world). In the next section, we will discuss this shift.

3.3 Concepts as providers of categorization rules

A category is a particular grouping of ‘things’. By definition, it groups together things by principle of equivalence and difference: some ‘things’ are considered as equivalent and treated as members of the category. Others are excluded – not considered as members. In this section, we will first of all investigate the nature of rules – categorization rules – that are applied in making such groupings. Secondly, these categorization rules will be discussed in the light of the variety – specificity dilemma.

Categorization rules

Categorization rules provide insight in two aspects of categories: (a) which or who are the members of a category and which or who are not, as well as (b) the status of these members.

With respect to the first, categorization rules prescribe which members are member of a category and which not. They also describe why some members belong to a category and why others do not. To understand categorization is to understand these rules on the basis of which ‘things’ are put in a category. Categorization rules are provided by concepts.

Lakoff (1987: xxi) has explained the relation between categories and concepts. According to him, concepts serve to cut the world into useful categories. As he observes: “For every concept there can be a corresponding category: those entities in a given domain of discourse that the concept fits (1987: xxi).” We have concepts of things in the world, like balls,

cars, cats, but also very abstract concepts, like 'freedom', 'love' or 'liberty'. For all of these we can consider the corresponding category.

Lakoff's view on the relation between categories and concepts is confirmed by other authors. According to Hampton & Dubois (1993: 13), the word concept refers to: "...the idea or notion by which an intelligence is able to understand some aspect of the world." Categories are referred to as: "...a class or set of entities (they could for example, be objects, actions, states qualities) which are grouped together on the basis of some criterion or rule (Hampton & Dubois, 1993: 13)." They illustrate the definition with an example: "The *concept* of a chair is defined here as that psychological state by means of which a person (or other intelligent agent) is able to understand that a particular object is, or may be considered as a type of chair. Understanding something as being a particular type here means being able to make some connection with previous knowledge, from which plausible inferences can be made. The *category* of chairs then refers to the set of entities in the world that may successfully be categorized as a chair in that the concept of chair can be used to understand them (1993: 13)." As this definition illustrates, a concept is responsible for the way 'things' are categorized.

This brings us to the *second aspect* of categories: the status of the members of a category; 'not all members of a category are equal'. The categorization research conducted by Rosch (et al.), has come up with ground breaking results concerning to the status of the members of a category. The experiments by Rosch (1975) have illustrated that members of a category differ as to the degree to which they are considered as members of that category⁵⁶. Her research shows that there is asymmetry among category members. Apparently, there are subcategories and/or categories with special cognitive status, that of being the "best example". These "prototypes" are members of a category that were considered by subjects as being more representative of the category than other members. For example, robins and sparrows were considered as better examples of the category "bird" than chickens or penguins. These asymmetries within categories are called 'prototype effects'.

So, a category refers to 'the grouping of things'. Within such a grouping, a) certain members are included and others excluded and b) some members have a different cognitive status than other members in that category. Concepts provide rules for the way such a grouping is made: "The distinction we have drawn between concepts and categories is mirrored in the distinction between *intension* and *extension*. Whereas con-

cepts are concerned with the intentional aspects of a concept/category relation (the information that is used for classification and the possible inferences that classification allows), categories concern the extensional aspects, the application of a term to refer to entities. The members of a category (those entities that fit the classification rule) are its extension (Hampton & Dubois, 1993: 14)."

The quotation raises two interesting points about the nature of categorization rules provided by a concept. *First*, it says that concepts generate the rules that lay down the boundaries of the categories. Why some things are considered as members of a category and others are not and why some "things" are considered as more typical members of the category than others, is defined by the rules provided by the concept. The categorization rules provided by a concept refer to *the general principles* a concept provides to determine which are (more prototypical) members of a category and which are not (less prototypical). In order to understand what these general principles are all about we have to return to our definition of categorization: "through categorization a *working* equivalence is established for a particular set of cases, and this equivalence in turn establishes a working difference between those sets of cases and other sets of cases-not just any kind of difference, but the categorical difference established by the sets of categories" (Ellis, 1993: 30). This quotation illustrates that 'things' are grouped together on the basis of some source of equivalence. Dependant of the particular source of equivalence, some 'things' are considered as a (more prototypical) member of a category and others are not (or: less prototypical member). In other words, a categorization rule reflects a source of equivalence (provide by a concept) that lays down the boundaries of a category. *Secondly*, these categorization rules can fulfil their task of drawing boundaries only by providing information about the 'things' that are to be categorized. Our concept of 'bird' provides information about the nature and features of possible (more or less prototypical) members and non-members of the category bird.

Knowing these general qualities of categories and concepts, let's see how these can be applied to the subject of this thesis that is the variety-specificity dilemma in branding. In the previous chapter, we argued that the normative brand concept has to be broad enough to absorb variety and while not losing its specificity. Their 'broadness'/'narrowness' (ability to allow variety) is determined by their ability to *draw boundaries*. The specificity of the normative brand concept is based on the fact that it

provides information. Dependant on the categorization rules provided by a concept, that corresponding category is broader or smaller. That means, it allows a bigger or smaller *variety* of members of categories. Some categories imply a bigger variety of members than others. At the same time, a concept provides information about the members of its corresponding categories. This information has a certain specificity. This specificity of information determines the degree of specific information the concept provides about the members of a category.

Theory on categories and concepts is helpful in understanding the variety-specificity dilemma. In paragraph 2.8.2., we argued that the need to absorb variety can be contradictory with the demand to stay specific. As we explained in the Honda example: if Honda extends its brand from motorcycles to cars and to lawn and garden tools, it risks becoming more general and less specific. The theoretical insight in concepts can illuminate this risk of becoming less specific under the influence of an increase in variety.

Categorization rules and the variety – specificity dilemma

Ellis has discussed the variety – specificity dilemma, by wondering why some linguistic categories are more specific and less vague than others. He has treated the degree to which linguistic categories are specific about the nature and features of their members. Some linguistic categories are very specific. They specify the nature and features of their members by rather exact definition. Other categories are far more general and are far less specific in grasping the nature and features of their members: “What can we say about the content of categories? In terms of characteristics of members of a category, some categories are relatively amorphous while others are more strictly organized. The class *good* is most amorphous of all, while scientific terms are the most tightly organized. *Triangle* is a highly organized category (Ellis, 1993: 23).” A category like ‘triangle’ is highly specific about the nature and features of its members. Consequently, there is not much uncertainty about the members of this category. A category like ‘good’ is less specific and more vague. It also provokes much more uncertainty by being so vague. There is much more uncertainty about what is considered as ‘good’, than about what is to be considered as a ‘triangle’.

Categories that are very specific about their members (like triangle) sometimes strongly limit the variety of ‘things’ that are allowed as member. In some cases, the more specific a category is about its members, the

less the variety of members the category groups together: specificity and broadness can be contradictory in some cases. In other words, Ellis argues that the bigger variety of members a category can group together, the less knowledge it can provide.

In Ellis' view, the continuum from most amorphous categories (good) to highly differentiated categories (triangle), is a continuum ranging from broad evaluative categories to specific factual categories. The general evaluative categories are vague (not specific) categories, just because they are groupings of "things" that are essentially different kinds of things: "The most amorphous category of language is one such as *good*. Here all kinds of things of fundamentally different kinds are gathered together in a category that only has one evaluative parameter: what is advantageous from a human point of view versus what is not. This category, then (...) is actually a grab bag of the most disorganized kind: it can cover all kinds of issues relating to food, shelter, skills, entertainment, relationships, and so on. Somewhat more differentiated than this are statements like 'this is weed', lumping together all kinds of disparate things (leaves, seeds, flowers, etc.) because they have a particular kind of value to us, the former lumping together a group of plants that have no value for human being, whatever value they have for other creatures. *Weeds* represent structurally an exceptionally diverse group (...). *Game* and *vermin* are similar kinds of products, but somewhat more differentiated and thus slightly less amorphous as to their membership. Words like *straight* and *crooked* continue along the continuum, which finally produces the highly differentiated and sophisticated terms of modern science. (...) The more general form of judgement, therefore, the more primitive and unsorted it is from an epistemological point of view. The category of things or events that are 'good' (...) is one that reduces a great variety of different instances to a single parameter: favourable or not favourable for human beings. How could we expect so vague and amorphous a category to yield much in the way of knowledge (1993: 75-76)?"

As this quotation illustrates, a large variety among the members of a category *can* lead to very vague categories providing not much specific information. This can be described in terms of the category – concept distinction we discussed above. Concepts that provide categorization rules that allow a great variety of members among their corresponding categories, *can* be less specific as to the information they provide about the members of these categories. As Ellis illustrates, the category of the concept *good* allows a lot of different kinds of members. At the same time, the

concept does not provide much information about the members of the corresponding category: what does it mean that something is *good*?

However, it does not necessarily mean that all concepts that define 'broad' categories also provide less specific information about its members. A concept like 'legal' corresponds with a category that is both broad as well as specific: we have a concept of 'legal' which can be applied to a broad variety of 'things' and which is yet highly defined and specific. Apparently, the variety – specificity dilemma cannot be understood fully neither by making reference to the variety of objects that is comprised by a category nor by the distinction factual versus evaluative categories. The category 'legal' includes a broad variety of objects *and* is both factual and evaluative at the same time. It is the notion behind the category 'legal' – the concept of 'legal' and the rules that are implied in that concept – that allows such a broad and at the same time specific categorization.

Apparently, concepts and the rules they imply determine categorization in a differentiated way. As the cognitive psychologists Hampton & Dubois argue: "If we start from the assumption that people have concepts and that they use them to determine categories, the next question is how this process of mapping works. That is to say, what kinds of rules are used in categorization? There will be no single answer to the question of how categorization rules are formulated. Different concepts may differ widely in the kinds of categorization rule they provide (Hampton & Dubois, 1993: 15)." That means that in order to understand the working of categorization rules in terms of the variety of members they allow and the specificity of information they yield more knowledge is needed regarding the concepts applied by the categorizer. This, we will discuss in the next section.

3.4 On the nature of concepts

3.4.1 Introduction

If we accept the idea that the equivalence imposed on 'things' by categorization is driven by the qualities of the categorizer and the concepts he applies rather than the qualities of the objects being categorized, it is necessary to have a basic understanding of conceptualization.

In this section, we will conduct research into the characteristics of concepts and conceptualization. In paragraph 3.4.2., we will discuss the

close relation between conceptualization and experiences. We will see that our daily experiences lead to our most primitive and basic 'pre-conceptual' structures, which will be subject of discussion in paragraph 3.4.3.: so called basic level categorization and kinaesthetic image schemes. In the last paragraph, the ability to build more complex concepts will be treated. These – as we will see in chapter 4 – are important for the study of brands, because brands are complex concepts.

3.4.2 *The relation between concepts and experience*

The fact that the constitution of a category is driven by the qualities of the categorizer, does not mean that the way this is done, is completely arbitrary – that it has no relation whatsoever with the qualities of the 'objects' being categorized. The fact that concepts are 'cognitive devices' does not mean that entities or 'things in the world' do not impose any structure on them whatsoever. The question is to what degree the equivalence established by a category is just part of "order of nature" or "part of the order loving mind" (Dobzansky, 1935: 345; cit in Brewer, 1994: 496)⁵⁷.

Here, we accept the idea that this equivalence is not established by the mind completely arbitrarily. Lakoff (1987: 154) argues that our capacity for creating and understanding concepts is grounded in our experiences. As such, our bodily and social experiences impose structure on our concepts: "Since bodily experience is constant experience of the real world that mostly involves successful functioning, stringent real-world constraints are placed on conceptual structure (1987: 268)." Lakoff speaks of the *embodiment* of concepts: "A concept is embodied when its content or other properties are motivated by bodily or social experience. This does not necessarily mean that the concept is predictable from experience, but rather that it makes sense that it has the content (or other properties) that it has, given the nature of the corresponding experience. Embodiment thus provides a *non-arbitrary* link between cognition and experience (1987: 154)."

In other words, Lakoff's notion of conceptual embodiment pertains to the idea that the properties of certain categories are a consequence of the nature of human biological capacities and of the experience of functioning in a physical and social environment. It is contrasted with the idea that concepts exist independently of the bodily nature of any thinking beings independent of their experience (1987: 12). Although concepts are 'cognitive devices', the equivalence they impose is not arbitrary. Lakoff's

approach emphasizes a certain commitment to the existence of a real world and he recognizes that reality places constraints on concepts. In that sense, Lakoff's approach is consistent with Ellis' views on the nature of linguistic categorization, discussed in the previous section.

Ellis position on this matter is that the nature of the equivalence established by categories is determined by functions in terms of the purposes and experiences of the categorizer: "In other words, the equivalence created by categories of a language is a functional one: those things included in a category can be and are treated as equivalent for the purpose of the category even though they are not identical (1993: 34)." It is the function that determines category membership. Function is considered in a very broad sense here. Function refers to the function 'things' that are grouped into a category can have for us. 'Things' are put into the same category ('food') because they have the same function for us (useful to eat). As discussed above, this does not mean that Ellis assumes that there are no real similarities among the members of a category at all. Although the nature of equivalence established by categories is ascribed to the purposes of the categorizer, Ellis' position does not imply that categories are pursued arbitrary. His position implies that there is a structure 'in the world' that puts constraints on the categorizer's abilities to group things together. The way we categorize is grounded in our purpose-directed experience of 'things'. This is what Ellis' notion of functional equivalence is all about: because we have the same kinds of purpose-directed experiences with 'things', we categorize them in certain ways: "They (categories) all (though in different ways) interfere significantly with the functioning of the human body. A table is not defined as anything that measures x by y inches but rather as something that affords a useful surface (Ellis, 1993: 31)." In Ellis' view our purpose-directed experiences with the object 'table' determines our definition of the category.

Lakoff's notion of embodiment and Ellis notion of functional embodiment are compatible in the sense that they both assume that concepts are some sort of 'condensed experiences', created and adjusted by purpose-directed experiences, which in turn help us to deal with new experiences. Building up concepts (condensed experiences) takes place by bodily experience with our environment.

These notions of Lakoff and Ellis can be applied to branding. We consider brands as concepts. Like any concept, a brand concept is also a 'condensed experience'. It is a 'product' of experiences brander and brand user have had with the brand. At the same time, it can be used by the brander

and brand user as a concept to relate new experiences to. As we already argued, a brand is a *generalized* concept, which means it is a concept that can be applied to a great variety of experiences by brander as well as brand user. The normative brand concept or brand identity, used by the brand regulator, is also 'condensed experience' build up by and changed in the regulation of operations by the brand regulator.

In Lakoff's approach, the construction of concepts – being rooted in our daily experiences – can be divided into different 'stages'. Lakoff shows that concepts are structured in a particular way. He distinguishes between the structuring of our preconceptual experiences and abstract conceptual structure. Insight in these ways of structuring is needed to understand the structure of brand concepts. As we will see, both preconceptual and abstract conceptual structures are applied in the construction and maintenance of brand concepts. The first embodies two kinds of structures: basic level categories and kinaesthetic image schemas. These are grounded in our first and most basic experiences and are understood directly. The second, the abstract conceptual structures are indirectly meaningful: "...they are understood because of their systematic relationship to directly meaningful structures (Lakoff, 1987: 268)." As we will see, these abstract conceptual structures are particularly interesting for the investigation of brands, because in many cases brands are built up from abstract concepts.

In section 3.4.3. we will discuss the structure of our preconceptual experience. These include basic level categories and image schemas. In section 3.3.4. we will discuss the principles by which these directly meaningful structures can function as building block for abstract conceptual structures.

3.4.3 *Basic level categories and kinaesthetic image schemes*

According to Lakoff, the structuring of our preconceptual experiences takes place by: (1) *the use of basic level categories* and (2) *kinaesthetic image schemes* (Lakoff, 1987: 267; Johnson, 1987). We will discuss these separately below.

Ad. 1 Basic level categories

In the middle seventies Rosch et. al. (1976) carried out a series of experiments that showed that certain types of categories ('basic categories') are psychologically 'privileged' across a wide variety of psychological

tasks. Rosch & Mervis (1976) discovered that three year olds are capable of sorting objects at 'a basic level'. This 'sorting' is called basic level categorization: "Basic-level categorization depends upon experiential aspects of human psychology: gestalt perception, mental imagery, motor activities, social function, and memory (Lakoff, 1987: 37)." Young children appeared to be able to sort together two different kinds of cows (compared to an airplane, say) or two different kinds of cars (compared to a dog or cat). They made very basic distinctions, so called basic level categories. Basic level categories are based on the convergence of our gestalt perception, our capacity for bodily movement, and our ability to form rich mental images (Lakoff, 1987: 267). As Rosch's experiments proved, basic level categories are basic in four respects (Lakoff, 1987: 47):

- Perception: this concerns overall perceived shape; single mental image; fast identification.
- Function: this has to do with general motor programme
- Communication: this contains the shortest, most commonly used and contextually neutral words, first learned by children and first to enter lexicon.
- Knowledge organization: most attributes of category members are stored at this level.

In other words, basic level categories are directly meaningful and the most 'useful distinctions to make in the world'.

Ad. 2 Kinaesthetic image-schemes

The kinaesthetic image-schemes are relative simple structures that constantly recur in our everyday experience, like Up-Down, Front-Back, Containers, Paths. These image schemes are acquired at a young age and represent a rough but very basic instrument we use to make sense of our world. As Lakoff argues: "Take, for example, a container schema – a schema consisting of a boundary distinguishing an interior and an exterior. The container schema defines the most basic distinction between in and out. We understand our bodies as containers-perhaps the most basic things we do are ingest and excrete, take air into our lungs and breathe it out (1987: 271)." Mark Johnson has argued that such kinaesthetic image schemes structure our experience together with our basic level concepts. He illustrates that these schemes are a way to structure our daily experiences: "Consider just a small fraction of the orientational feats you per-

form constantly in your daily activities—consider, for example, only a few of the many in-out orientations that might occur in the first few minutes of an ordinary day. You wake *out* of a deep sleep and peer *out* from beneath the covers *into* your room. You gradually emerge *out* of your stupor, pull yourself *out* from under the covers, climb *into* your robe, stretch *out* your limbs, and walk *in* a daze *out* of your bedroom and *into* the bathroom. You look *in* the mirror and see your face staring *out* at you (Johnson, 1987: 25)."

There are different kinds of kinaesthetic image schemes, which we will discuss in section 3.5., like the container schema, the part-whole schema, the link schema, etc. These schemas structure our experiences and our knowledge.

These basic schemes, basic level categories and kinaesthetic image schemes, are directly meaningful because they are directly and repeatedly experienced as a consequence of the nature of the body and its mode of functioning in the environment. The existence of these basic level categories and image schemas illustrate that the pursue of concepts, although a cognitive process, does not take place arbitrarily: it is grounded in such basic schemes. Although not every person or culture has to pursue exactly the same basic schemes, all persons are similar in that their concepts are structured by these structures. Due to different experiences the basic level categories of people of different cultures might differ. People who live in the mountains of Mexico probably partly have different 'things' that are considered as basic level categories than for Eskimos. They will probably partly pursue or favour different image schemes. However, in both cases concepts do not exist or arise from the void. They are built up out of basic schemes⁵⁸.

3.4.4 *From basic level categories and image schemas to more abstract conceptual structure*

According to Lakoff, the basic level categories and kinaesthetic image schemas, which are understood directly, are the building blocks for more abstract concept formation. These abstract concepts are indirectly meaningful: "...they are understood because of their systematic relationship with directly meaningful structures (Lakoff, 1998: 268)." Since brands are abstract concepts, the study of these concepts is of major importance to us.

There are two ways in which these abstract conceptual structures arise from these directly experienced structures:

- 1 By projection from basic level categories to higher or lower hierarchy levels
- 2 By metaphorical projection from the domain of the physical to the domain of the abstract

Ad. 1 Projection from basic level categories to higher or lower hierarchy levels: super ordinate and subordinate categories.

At the level of basic level categories we are able to distinguish basic categories that are 'somewhat in the middle'. At this level we distinguish tigers from plants, chairs from tables, copper from lead, beer from wine. Basic level categories are at the intermediate level of our experience. One level down, things are much more difficult to distinguish from each other. If the category 'chair' is a basic level category, the categories 'plastic chair' and 'wheel-chair' are all lower level categories. If the category 'plant' is a basic level category, the begonia is a lower level category. It is much harder to distinguish a begonia from a geranium than to distinguish a plant from a tiger.

One level higher than the basic level are the super ordinate categories. The super ordinate category of 'chair' is 'furniture'. Super ordinate categories do not share appearances and affordances the way basic level categories do. They are not 'directly' meaningful as basic level categories are.

Hence, basic level categories are in the middle of a taxonomic hierarchy, as shown below:

Super ordinate	animal	furniture
Basic level	dog	chair
Subordinate	retriever	rocker

Another principle by which we leave the directly experienced or basic level is by abstraction and by projection from 'the physical domain' onto more abstract domains.

Ad. 2 Metaphorical projection from the domain of the physical to abstract domains.

Lakoff (1987: 276) shows that the basic schemas also motivate abstract conceptual structure. Structural correlations in our experience (correlations that are reflected by image schemes), motivate metaphors that map basic 'logic' onto abstract domains. What is called abstract reason has a

bodily basis in our everyday functioning. Lakoff shows this by explaining the working of metaphors.

By metaphoric projection, aspects of a more directly understood source domain are projected onto a more abstract target domain. Lakoff (1987: 276) explains this by showing the working of the metaphor '*More is up, less is down*'. Examples of the working of this metaphor are 'the crime rate is rising' or 'that stock has fallen again'. The source domain is verticality; the target domain is quantity. Aspects of the source domain verticality are mapped upon the target domain quantity. This projection and mapping does not take place arbitrarily. Lakoff argues that this particular mapping occurs for a reason by showing it is grounded in preconceptual structure. He does so by answering three questions:

- 1 What makes verticality appropriate as a source domain?
- 2 Why is verticality rather than some other domain used to understand quantity?
- 3 Why is more mapped onto up, rather than onto down?

The answer to the first question, as Lakoff shows us, lies in the fact that in order to be able to function as a source domain for a metaphor a domain must be understood *independently* of the metaphor. Verticality is directly understood independently of quantity, since the up-down schema structures all of our functioning relative to gravity.

Lakoff continues: "The answers to questions 2 and 3 come from the existence of a structural correlation in our daily experience that motivates every detail in this particular metaphorical mapping. Whenever we add *more* of a substance- say water to a glass- the level goes *up*. When we add *more* objects to a pile, the level *rises*. Remove objects from the pile or water from the glass, and the level goes down. The correlation is overwhelming:

MORE correlates with UP

LESS correlates with DOWN

This correlation provides an answer to questions 2 and 3 (1987: 277).

With respect to the second question, Lakoff argues that verticality serves as an appropriate source domain for understanding quantity because of the regular correlation in our experience between verticality and quantity. The third question is answered by the observation that the details of the mapping are motivated by the details of structural correlation cited above. Every detail of the metaphor is thus motivated by the direct

meaningful structures that are directly related to our physical functioning. As Lakoff argues: "The point is this: Schemas that structure our bodily experience preconceptually have a basic logic. Preconceptual structural correlations in experience motivate metaphors that map that logic onto abstract domains (1987: 278)."

Our discussion of Lakoff and Ellis in this section shows that our concepts, and hence the categorization rules they provide, are grounded in our daily experiences. Concepts help us to give structure to the world. As we have seen, there is a difference to be made between basic level categories and kinaesthetic image schemas which structure our preconceptual experiences, and a more abstract conceptual structure. The first are directly meaningful, the second indirectly for they are only meaningful because of their systematic relationship with the first.

So far we have discussed the notions of concepts and categories in their own right. To gain a deeper insight in the categorization rules provided by a certain concept however, we need to know how that concept is related to other concepts. As we will see in the next section, the structure of concepts (internally and in relation to others) can be analysed by using the notion of cognitive models.

3.5 Characterising the structure of concepts: Idealized Cognitive Models

The categorization rules provided by a concept can be clarified by showing how that concept is related to other concepts. Concepts do not exist independently; they are related to other concepts. During our development, we built up a network of related concepts which have proved to 'work'. This network of concepts helps us to characterize and make sense of new concepts. The network of concepts functions as a frame of reference between which particular (new) concepts get their meaning⁵⁹. Lakoff (1987: 281-285) introduces a particular kind of network of concepts, which he calls Idealized Cognitive Models. An Idealized Cognitive Model (ICM) can be considered as a particular kind of network of concepts, which has proved to 'work' and functions as a frame of reference for new concepts.

Concepts are understood relative to such a network of related concepts, called an ICM. The concept *Tuesday* is defined relative to an ideal-

ized cognitive model that includes the natural circle defined by the movement of the sun, the standard way of the end and beginning of the day and the seven day calendric cycle-the week (1987: 68). As Lakoff claims, our model of a week is idealized. Seven days do not exist in nature as a fact. They are created by human beings. In some cultures a much more complex ICM is required to define the concept of one day.

So, concepts are understood relative to an idealized cognitive model. As such, the categorization rules provided by a certain concept depend on the way that that concept is related to other concepts within an idealized cognitive model. Lakoff shows this by giving an example of the concept *bachelor*. In Fillmore's (1982) discussion of a bachelor, someone is called a bachelor when he is an unmarried man. However, although he is an unmarried man, we would not say that a priest fits the category 'bachelor'. Fillmore shows that the term bachelor is also is a device for categorizing people only in the context of a certain human society that has some (unwritten) rules about marriage and the marriageable age. The definition of *bachelor* as an unmarried man is based on an ICM in which there is a human society with (typically monogamous) marriage, and a typical marriageable age. Stated differently, the concept bachelor is understood relative to a network of related concepts (society with monogamous marriage, age etc.) that is idealized. The ICM characterizes ideal bachelors. The idealized model says nothing about the existence of priests or 'long term unmarried couples'.

In Lakoff's terms, this idealized model does not fit the world very precisely, it is oversimplified: it is not fitting in every situation to say that an unmarried adult male fits the category "bachelor". The ICM does not fit when describing the Pope or indeed Tarzan; although they are both unmarried, we would not call them bachelor. Apparently, to consider someone as a member of a certain category involves a comparison between a particular ICM (say the 'bachelor ICM') and the knowledge we have of that 'someone' (say the Pope). Someone qualifies as a member of the category 'bachelor' if the ICM for bachelor fits the cognitive model characterising one's knowledge about an individual, say the Pope. Both models could differ with respect to some aspects and overlap. This 'process of fitting' in itself is irreducible a cognitive process.

So, an ICM helps to characterize a particular concept, say *bachelor*, by relating it to an idealized cognitive model of a bachelor. Dependent on that particular characterization, 'things' are considered as members of the category. The particular characterization of the concept *bachelor*, giv-

en by the ICM we described above, together with the knowledge we have of the person to be categorized, suggest whether or not this particular person is considered as a member of a particular category

So, if we describe a concept as an ICM, we look at it as a 'network of concepts'. As network of concepts, an ICM can be used as a frame of reference for other concepts. In that case, it provides the knowledge (the network of concepts) that can be used to categorize 'things'.

ICMs – a network of concepts – can work as a frame of reference for other concepts, because:

- they are generalized
- they are idealized
- they consist of related concepts themselves
- they might consist of related subconcepts as well
- they can be used to analyse the relation between (sub)concepts

We will now describe these five aspects of ICMs.

First of all ICMs are generalized. As our example above illustrates, the ICM which fits the concept bachelor is an ICM of a human society with (typically monogamous) marriage and a typical marriageable age. The ICM generalizes about the characteristics of marriage in a society. It does not characterize one particular marriage of a couple at a particular time. We could say that it has been proven to work for different situations, hence its general character.

Secondly, ICMs are not only generalized, they are idealized as well. That means, they reflect the preferences and norms within a particular society. The cognitive model that serves as a frame of reference for the concept bachelor, gives a generally *preferred* view on how to think of unmarried men. As Lakoff argues: "The idealized model (of bachelor) says nothing about the existence of priests, 'long term unmarried couples', homosexuality, Moslems who are permitted four wives and only have three, etc. With respect to this idealized cognitive model, a bachelor is simply an unmarried adult man (Lakoff, 1987: 70)." Because of its idealized character, an ICM is a powerful framework for the interpretation of concepts.

Thirdly, ICMs are cognitive models that consist of related concepts themselves! As Lakoff argues: "In general, concepts are elements of cognitive models. Many concepts, for example, are characterized in terms of scenario ICMs. The concept 'waiter' is characterized relative to a restaurant scenario. The concept buyer is characterized relative to a commercial

exchange scenario. The concept second baseman is characterized relative to a baseball game scenario (1987: 286).” As this quotation indicates, an ICM is a network of concepts. The baseball game scenario consists of all kind of concepts, of which the second baseman is only one. The concept of ‘batter’ or ‘bat’ are other concepts which belong to a ‘baseball ICM’. The relationship between concept and ICM appears to be recursive: the concept characterizes the ICM and the ICM characterizes the concept.

Fourthly, as the example of the restaurant scenario indicates, an ICM also characterizes how a concept is structured internally. If we do not consider the waiter, but the restaurant as a concept, we could say that the concept restaurant is structured internally by a scenario ICM. It is structured by different subconcepts which appear in a sequence (waiter, cook, owner etc.). Concepts which have an internal structure will be called complex concepts.

Fifthly, an ICM indicates *how* (sub)concepts are related to each other within a structure. They indicate the relations between – the structure of – a network of (sub)concepts. As the quotation above indicates, the ICM of the restaurant not only indicates the elements of that ICM, it also characterizes the relationship between its (sub)concepts. Apparently, the elements of the restaurant scenario are related to each other by a specific type of relationship, namely a sequence of events called a scenario. As we will see in the next section, there are different types of ICMs which all identify different ways in which (sub)concepts can be related to (are structured with respect to) each other. They identify differences in conceptual structure.

Before discussing these different types of ICMs, let’s try to show how the notions of categories, concepts and cognitive models are related to each other. In figure 3.1., we simulated a situation in which a certain category – the category of waiter – is defined. To understand this process, we have distinguished between an intension and extension.

On the intentional side, we first of all recognize a mental space that defines a space for certain concepts. As Lakoff continues: “Mental spaces is what cognitive model theory uses in place of possible worlds and situations. They are like possible worlds in that they can be taken as representing our understanding of hypothetical and fictional situations (....) The major difference is that mental spaces are conceptual in nature. They have no ontological status outside the mind (1987: 282).” The status of mental spaces is purely cognitive. A mental space can include:

- our immediate reality, as understood

- fictional situations, situations in paintings, movies, etc.
- past or future situations, as understood,
- hypothetical situations,
- abstract domains, e.g., conceptual domains (e.g. subject matters such as economics, politics, physics), mathematical domains, etc. (Lakoff, 1987: 281)."

Secondly, we highlight a particular kind of network of (sub)concepts, an ICM. The mental space functions as a kind of domain within which a particular network of (sub)concepts is relevant. A mental space could be 'our immediate reality as understood'. Let's imagine that the mental space would be the situation in which someone is talking to his girlfriend about applying for a job as a waiter. In that mental space, a particular concept, waiter, pops up. That particular concept is understood relative to a particular network of (sub)concepts, an ICM. The ICM structures the mental space. It characterizes a specific relationship between specific (sub)concepts. The concept of waiter is related to the restaurant ICM. As part of the restaurant scenario, the particular concept in use (waiter) is understood as part of the restaurant scenario, by which it becomes related to other kinds of (sub)concepts (such as; attendants, cook, an owner etc) and obtains a specific meaning.

On the extensional side, the concept waiter corresponds with a particular category of waiters. The characterization of someone (for instance himself) as being a member of that category depends on the concept of waiter he applies and the ICM he uses. Relative to a particular ICM he can characterize himself as being a member of the category waiters. In other words, depending on the specific way in which the *concept* waiter is related to other (sub)concepts within the ICM – in this case: the waiter is understood relative to a restaurant scenario ICM – he considers himself a member of the category.

The discussion above provides some indications about the relationship between categories, concepts and cognitive models. We argued that we can gain insight in the boundaries of a category (to investigate its variety) and the specific information about the members of that category (to investigate the specificity), by analysing the (sub)concepts which correspond to that category. As figure 3.1. shows, we have to look even further than that. The variety permitted in a category as well as the specific information given to its members, depends on the way in which the corresponding concept relates to other (sub)concepts, within the particular

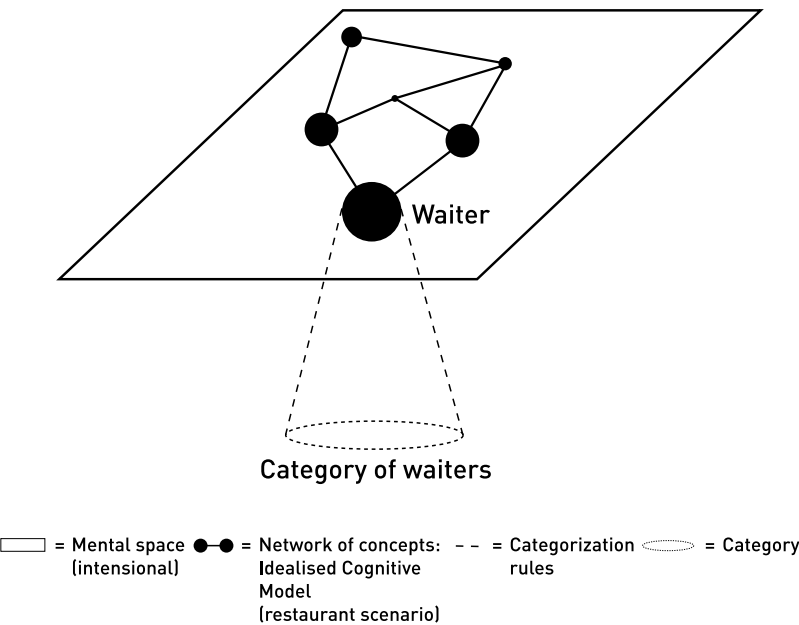


Figure 3.1 Categories, concepts and cognitive models

network of (sub)concepts we call an ICM. This relationship between the concepts can be characterized by specific types of ICMs. In the next section we will discuss different types of ICMs.

3.6 Different types of ICMs

3.6.1 Introduction

Cognitive models characterize the way (sub)concepts are structured relative to each other and, by doing this, motivate the way in which categories group entities together. In this section we will deal with different types of idealized cognitive models (ICM). Dependent on the type of ICM, the network of (sub)concepts is structured differently. Before discussing the different types themselves, we will first introduce the notion of the ‘structure of concepts’. The different types of ICMs follow logically from these structures.

3.6.2 *The structure of ICMs*

According to Lakoff, there are two kinds of complex structures an ICM can consist of: building block structures and gestalt structures:

- A complex symbolic structure has a building block structure if its structural elements all exist independently, and if the meaning of the whole is a function of the meanings of the parts.
- Otherwise, it has a gestalt structure, that is, a structure (a) whose elements do not all exist independent of the whole or (b) whose overall meaning is not predictable from the meanings of its parts and the way these parts are put together (1987: 284).

Basic level and image-schematic concepts have a gestalt structure. They are meaningful as a whole: “For example, the Container schema has an interior, exterior and boundary; those parts do not all exist independent of the schema. The concept Interior, for example, does not make sense independently of the container gestalt. Similarly, all the other image-schemas are gestalts with structures of the sort described above. Basic level concepts also have a gestalt structure, defined in part by image and motor movements (1987:284).”

So, the basic level concepts and image schematic concepts in an ICM may be meaningful as such. Other concepts are understood indirectly via their relationship to these directly understood concepts. Such relationships are defined by the image schemes that structure the ICMs⁶⁰.

An ICM is always structured by image schemes. As we argued image schema structure our experience of space. They are so basic to us, that they underpin the structure of all ICMs. The image schemas, besides being concepts themselves which might appear in a particular ICM, also provide structure to all ICMs: “Image schemas thus play two roles: They are concepts that have directly understood structures of their own, and they are used metaphorically to structure other complex concepts (1987: 283).”

ICMs thus consist of either directly understood concepts or indirectly understood concepts and the image schemas play a crucial role in that they structure ICMs. As Lakoff summarizes: “The basic idea is this:

- Given basic level and image schematic concepts, it is possible to build up more complex cognitive models.
- Image schemas provide the structures used in those models (1987: 282).”

Knowing the basic way in which ICMs are structured, we can now describe in greater depth the variety in types of ICMs that can exist. There are different types of ICMs which are purely conceptual⁶¹:

- 1 image schematic models (3.6.3.)
- 2 propositional models (3.6.4.)
- 3 metaphoric models (3.6.5.)
- 4 metonymic models (3.6.6.)

We will discuss these separately in the next paragraphs.

3.6.3 *Image schematic models*

As discussed, kinaesthetic image-schemas play two roles: they are concepts that have directly understood structures of their own (image schematic concepts), and they are used to structure other complex concepts (image schemas). They structure other complex concepts by metaphoric mapping from the physical domain into more abstract conceptual structures. Image schemas are structuring devices that allow us to create complex concepts.

In the example given by Mark Johnson (see the previous section) it is indicated that image schemas structure our spatial experiences. Johnson (1987⁶²) has identified different kinds of these image schemas. To illustrate their basic function, we will discuss four of them: the container schema, the part-whole schema and the link schema. We will discuss them by characterising four specific features of them:

- how they are rooted into our bodily experience
- their structural elements
- possible metaphors which are based on the schema
- their basic logic

1 The container schema

- Bodily experience: as Johnson points out, we experience our bodies both as containers and as things in containers (e.g. rooms) constantly:
- Structural elements: Interior, boundary, exterior
- Basic logic: (...) Everything is either inside a container or out of it (...).
- Sample metaphors: The visual field is understood as a container, e.g., things *come into* and *go out of sight*. Personal relationships are also understood in terms of containers: one can be *trapped in a marriage* and *get out of it* (Lakoff, 1987: 272)."

2 The part whole schema

- Bodily experience: We are whole beings with parts that we can manipulate. Our entire lives are spent with an awareness of both our wholeness and our parts. We experience our bodies as wholes with parts. In order to get around in the world, we have to be aware of the part-whole structure of other objects (...).
- Structural elements: A whole, parts and a configuration.
- Basic logic: The schema is asymmetric: If A is a part of B, then B is not a part of A. It is irreflexive: A is not a part of A. Moreover it cannot be that the whole exists, while no parts of it exists. However, all the parts can exist, but still not constitute a whole (...).
- Sample metaphors: Families (and other social organisations) are understood as a whole with parts. For example: marriage is understood as creation of the family (a whole) with the spouses as parts. Divorce is thus viewed as splitting up (..) (Lakoff, 1987: 273).

3 The link schema

- Bodily experience: Our first link is the umbilical cord. Throughout infancy and early childhood, we hold onto our parents and other things, either to secure our location or theirs. To secure the location of two things relative to one another, we use such things as string, rope, or other means of connection.
- Structural elements: Two entities, A and B, and Link connecting them.
- Basic logic: If A is linked to B, then A is constrained by, and dependent upon B. Symmetry: If A is linked to B, then B is linked to A.
- Metaphors: Social and interpersonal relationships are often understood in terms of links. Thus we make connections and break social ties. Slavery is understood as bondage, and freedom as the absence of anything tying us down (1987: 274).

The structure of any concept can be related to a particular image scheme. So, image schematic models can be used to understand the structure of a (brand) concept. However, since they are so basic for every concept, image schematic models provide very basic information about the structure of a concept. Especially in the case of brand concepts, propositional models can be useful to characterize the structure as well.

3.6.4 Propositional models

A propositional ICM represents a group of ICMs that does not use imaginative devices, like metaphor, metonymy or mental imagery⁶³. Each ICM has, what Lakoff calls, an 'ontology' and a 'structure'. The 'ontology' of an ICM is the *set of elements* used in the ICM. These may be either basic level concepts – entities, properties, actions, states etc. – or concepts characterized by cognitive models of other types. The structure consists of the *properties* of these elements and the *relations* obtaining among elements.

Propositional models contain entities, with their properties and relations holding among them (1987: 285). However, it is important to remember that these entities are mental entities, not 'real things'. Propositional models are cognitive models, not slices of reality.

There are different types of propositional models⁶⁴:

- 1 the scenario
- 2 feature bundle structure
- 3 classical taxonomic structure
- 4 graded conceptual structure⁶⁵
- 5 radial conceptual structure

In the case of the scenario, the different entities in the model are related by a sequential relationship. In the case of the classical taxonomic structure, the different entities are related to each other by hierarchy. With the feature bundles, the entities are features themselves. If the ICM has a graded conceptual structure, the entities are not classically defined, by necessary and sufficient conditions, but some entities are considered as more representative than others. In case of the graded conceptual structure the boundaries that determine membership of entities are less sharp compared to the classical conceptual structure. Finally, in case of the radial conceptual structure, there are central and peripheral entities, and the peripheral entities are linked to the central ones.

What all these different types have in common, is that in all cases they are build up from entities, properties of and relationships among these entities. As such, they differ from metonymic and metaphoric models, which (as we will see) are based on the use of imaginative devices. We will discuss the different types of propositional models (Lakoff, 1987: 285-288) briefly, and indicate the kind of categorization rules that are linked to particular ICMs. As we will see, each ICM provides a specific categorization rule.

Ad 1 The scenario

As we discussed in the previous section, the concept of *waiter* is related to a restaurant scenario. The concept of *buyer* is characterized to a commercial exchange scenario. The concept of *second baseman* is characterized relative to a baseball scenario. All these (sub)concepts become meaningful relative to an ICM that identifies a sequence of events: a scenario.

A scenario has the following 'ontology': an initial state, a sequence of events, and a final state. The scenario is structured by a particular image schema: the source, path, goal schema, whereas:

- the initial state is the source
- the final state is the destination
- the events are the locations of the path.

The ontology of the scenario consists typically of all sorts of entities (people, things) and properties. That makes the scenario a propositional ICM. In addition there are typical relations holding among the elements of the 'ontology': causal relations, identity relations etc.

The categorization rule which is provided by the scenario, is that entities are placed among other entities within a sequence of events.

Ad 2 Feature bundles

In section 3.4, we argued that both physical similarities and functional similarities can be used as a basis for categorization rules. 'Things' can be considered as members of the same category because physical or functional similarities are attributed to them. Stated otherwise: 'being similar' in terms of physical or functional features is one possible rule for categorizing 'things'. The underlying principle of this categorization rule, is that the members of the category are considered as feature bundles.

A feature is a symbol representing a property. A feature bundle is a set of such features, representing a *collection of properties* (Lakoff, 1987: 115 and 272-273). Structurally, the bundle is characterized by a container schema, where the properties are inside the container.

The categorization rule that is provided by a feature bundles, is that the 'things' (entities, categories of 'things') are grouped together because they share one or more properties. These can be either physical or functional properties. In the first case, 'things' are grouped together on the basis of their physical appearance. In the second case they are grouped to-

gether because they are used for the same purpose.

Ad. 3 Classical taxonomic structure

The elements of the classical taxonomical structure are entities. Each entity is structured by a container schema. Each entity is a feature bundle and defined by necessary and sufficient conditions. Each entity has the properties contained in the feature bundles.

In the classical taxonomy, the entities are related to each other by hierarchy. The hierarchy is characterized structurally by part-whole schemas and up-down schemas. Each higher level entity is a whole, with the immediate lower level entities being its parts. The higher level entity contains all of each lower level entities. At each level the categories are non overlapping (Lakoff, 1987: 287). The feature bundles defining lower-level entities include all the features of the bundles defining higher-level entities. A classical taxonomy intends to categorize all entities in some domain in terms of their properties. The highest level category in the taxonomy encompasses the entire domain.

The categorization rules that this ICM provides, are based on the fact that 'entities' are given a place among other entities within a taxonomic hierarchy.

Ad. 4 Graded conceptual structure

A graded conceptual structure means that entities differ with respect to the degree in which they are members of that entity as a whole. Experiments by Rosch et.al (1977, 1981) have shown that members of many categories differ with respect to the degree in which they are considered as members of a category. There are categories or subcategories with special cognitive status, that of 'best example'. In case of the category 'bird', the (sub)category sparrow is considered as a better example of the category bird than the (sub)category penguin. The experiments by Rosch show that in many cases the structure of these categories is graded: some members are considered as 'more' a member than others (Rosch & Mervis, 1981). Graded categories show a range in category representativeness from the most representative members of the category to the non members that are the least similar to the category.

In a classical conceptual structure, the boundary of a category is sharp. In graded conceptual structure the boundaries are fuzzy, defined by a linear scale of values between 0 and 1 – with 1 at the interior and 0 at the exterior -. Elements are not merely in the interior or exterior, but may be located in the fuzzy boundary area, at some point along the scale between

0 and 1. That point defines the degree of membership of a given element (Lakoff, 1987: 288). For instance, the category 'colour' or 'red' has a graded conceptual structure and fuzzy boundaries. The attribution of members to a category is not based on clear sharp boundaries. Some colour may be 'reddish' or 'more red than another colour'.

The graded category structure defines a categorization rule that prescribes that one (or more) members of a particular entity are more representative for the particular entity than others.

Ad. 5 Radial conceptual structure

The radial conceptual structure is characterized by a centre-periphery schema. A radial conceptual structure consists of a central subconcept that is linked to various other peripheral subconcepts. The central subconcept is the most important for the concept. The subconcepts cannot be completely understood purely on their own terms; they are comprehended by means of their relationship with the central subconcept. These subconcepts are particularizations of that central case. For instance, the central subconcept of mother is related to a different subconcept such as foster mother, birth mother, adoptive mother. There is one central case of *mother* that is linked to less central cases of *mothers*, which are all understood as deviations from the central case. The concept *mother* is structured radially with respect to a number of its subconcepts: there is a central subconcept, defined by a cluster of converging models. In addition, there are non central concepts that are extensions of the central case. The extensions are conventionalized variations, which cannot be predicted by general rules, but must be learned. Hence, radial conceptual structure consists of one subconcept that is the centre; the other subconcepts are linked to the centre by various types of links. The categorization rules provided by the radial ICM are based on considering the relation between entities or properties in terms of one entity or property being a particularization of the other.

The radial conceptual structure is a propositional structure in the sense that the central and peripheral subconcepts are properties or entities. Like the other types of ICMs belonging to the propositional structure, the radial ICMs are not structured using imaginative devices. The metaphoric and metonymic ICMs however are. How these two imaginative devices work will be explained below.

3.6.5 Metaphoric models

Unlike propositional models, both metaphoric and metonymic models involve imaginative devices. In case of a metaphor, a 'term' is not used literally, but we comprehend it in terms of 'something else'. ICMs of propositional structure are based on the attribution of properties to categories (or vice versa), or relating properties and categories to one another. In case of the metaphoric ICM, a concept within a particular domain is related to another concept that exists in another domain.

We generally speak of metaphors if words are used beyond their 'literal' meaning. However, metaphors are not just a side effect of language. According to some authors, metaphor is more basic to our human functioning than previously presumed. Lakoff & Johnson (1980) argue that metaphor is more than a device for poetic imagination. They claim that metaphors are pervasive in our everyday way of thinking, speaking and acting: "Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature. The concepts that govern our thought are not just matters of intellect. They also govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details. Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people (1980: 287)."

Metaphors work by relating aspects of a particular concept that belongs to some particular domain, to another domain. Let's start with an example of the concept ARGUMENT, and the metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR, in which the properties of war are related to argumentation. This metaphor is reflected in our everyday language by the expressions (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 288):

ARGUMENT IS WAR

Your claims are *indefensible*
 He *attacked every weak point* in my argument
 His criticisms were *right on target*
 I *demolished* his argument
 I've never *won* an argument with him
 You disagree? Okay, *shoot!*
 If you use that strategy, he'll *wipe you out*
 He *shot down* all my arguments

Such a metaphor has rich generative power. It is not just about using words, it structures our actions and thinking: "We see the person we are arguing with as an opponent. We attack their position and defend our own. We gain and lose ground. We plan and use strategies. If we find a position indefensible, we can abandon it and take a new line of attack. Many of the things we do are partially structured by the concept of war (1980: 288)." The metaphorical conception, ARGUMENT IS WAR, partially structures what we do and how we understand what we do when we argue: "The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing or experience in terms of another. It is not that arguments are a subspecies of wars. Arguments and wars are different kinds of things – verbal discourse and armed conflict- and the actions performed are different kinds of actions. But ARGUMENT is partially structured, understood, performed, and talked about in terms of war (1980: 288)."

In other words, the concept ARGUMENT is thus metaphorically structured, which means that some aspects of the concept ARGUMENT are understood in terms of another concept (WAR). Both concepts are different from each other, they belong to a different domain. The concept ARGUMENT belongs to the domain of verbal discourse, the concept WAR to the domain of armed conflict. Following Lakoff (1987: 276) we will call the first domain the target domain, the second the source domain. That makes the concept ARGUMENT the target concept and the concept WAR the source concept. An aspect of a more directly understood source concept is projected onto a target concept. This allows us to comprehend aspects of the target concept in terms of the source concept: understanding aspects of arguing in terms of war. For instance, aspects of defending an argument, attacking an argument, demolishing an argument. They all represent aspects of the concept ARGUMENT which are understood in terms of the concept WAR. That implies that other aspects of experiencing a concept are hidden by the metaphor. By deploying the metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR, we are forgetting the more cooperative aspects of arguing, like finding a solution together, or becoming wiser by having an argument. The metaphor provides us with partial understanding of what "argument" is. By doing so, it hides other aspects of the concept. This characteristic of metaphorical structuring – that of highlighting and hiding- is very fundamental: "It is important to see that the metaphorical structuring involved here is partial, not total. If it were total, one concept would *be* the other, would not merely be understood in terms of it (1980: 294)." For instance, argument is not actually war. You

will not die as a result of losing an argument. If an argument is demolished, there is no physical damage.

The 'source to target mapping' assumes some kind of correlation between the source concept and the target concept (Lakoff, 1987: 276). The correspondence between the concepts ARGUMENT and WAR which is induced by the metaphor, is that both are about people defending their interest in a rather fierce way, for instance. The source and target domain of a metaphorical ICM is structured by a propositional or image schematic model. The source and target domains are represented structurally by container schemas, and the mapping is represented by a source-path-goal schema (1987: 288).

Lakoff & Johnson (1980: 294-297) have distinguished different kinds of metaphors: structural metaphors, physical metaphors and orientational metaphors.

The metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR is an example of the *first type* of metaphor, the structural metaphor. A structural metaphor represents cases in which one concept is metaphorically structured in terms of another (e.g., ARGUMENT is structured in terms of WAR). Structural metaphors often involve using a concept from one domain to structure a concept from another domain. The *second type*, the physical metaphors are different (1980: 295): "Physical metaphors involve the projection of an entity or a substance status upon something that does not have that status inherently. Such conventional metaphors allow us to view events, activities, emotions, ideas, etc. as entities for various purposes (e.g. in order to refer to them, categorize them, group them or quantify them). For example, we find physical metaphors such as:

My *fear of insects* is driving my wife crazy (referring)

The *brutality of war* dehumanizes us all (identifying aspects)"

Physical metaphors are metaphors by which we understand either non-physical or not clearly bounded things as entities: "in most cases such metaphors involve the use of a concept from the physical domain to structure a concept from the cultural or intellectual domains. The *third type* of metaphor is the "orientational metaphor". This metaphor does not structure one concept in terms of another, but instead organizes a whole system of concepts with respect to one another. Lakoff & Johnson call these orientational metaphors because they have to do with spatial orientation. This spatial orientation, is indicated with the use of image schemes, like FRONT-BACK, IN-OUT, CENTRAL-PERIPHERAL. In section 3.4., we

have discussed that these image schemes can be used metaphorically to structure more complex concepts. One particular image scheme can generate a whole system of metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 296- 298). If that is the case, we speak of orientational metaphors.

As we will see in the next chapter, the metaphorical ICM plays an important role in understanding the way in which the brand as a network of concepts is structured. Metaphoric mappings are used to project aspects of abstract domains onto products. By doing so, concrete products are understood in terms of more abstract concepts. This is a result of the categorization rule provided by the metaphoric ICM that says that the one entity or property (a product for instance) can be understood in terms of another that exist in a different domain (an abstract concept).

3.6.6 *Metonymic models*

Like metaphors, metonyms are very common in everyday life. They are reflected in sentences we use, like (Lakoff, 1987: 77):

- One waiter says to another, “The ham sandwich just spilled beer all over himself”.

In this case the ham sandwich is ‘standing for’ the person eating the ham sandwich. Other examples are:

- “The White House isn’t saying anything”.
- “Wall street is in panic”

Metonymic models define a subconcept that is used to stand for the entire concept. Whereas metaphoric mapping involves a mapping between two different domains, metonymic mapping occurs within a single conceptual domain. The metonymic model has the following characteristics (Lakoff, 1987: 84-85):

- There is a ‘target’ concept A to be understood for some purpose in some context.
- There is a conceptual structure containing both A and another concept B
- B is either part of A or closely associated with it in that conceptual structure.

Typically, a choice of B will uniquely determine A, within that conceptual structure.

- Compared to A, B is either easier to understand, easier to remember, easier to recognize or more immediately useful for the given purpose in the given context.
- A metonymic model is a model of how A and B are related in a conceptual structure; the relationship is specified by a function from B to A.

When such a metonymic model exists, B stands metonymically for A. There are different kinds of metonyms. One example is the social stereotype (1987: 85-86), like the housewife stereotype of women. The subconcept housewife stands for the whole concept of women. Another type of metonym is the 'ideal' (1987: 87). The ideal husband is a good provider, faithful, strong, respected, attractive. Characterising the husband in such a way is using a metonym: the ideal husband stands for all husbands in general.

As such, the metonym provides a different kind of categorization rule that is different from, say the feature bundle. In terms of the feature bundle, a qualification like 'faithful' would be 'just' a property of someone. In terms of the metonymic ICM, 'faithful' – in the example above – is not 'just' a property, but *highlights* an aspect of the 'ideal' husband.

In this section, we have described different types of ICMs. These different types of ICMs, characterize different ways in which concepts are structured internally and relative to each other. Different structures provide different kinds of categorization rules, which means that they apply different principles by which the concept draws category boundaries (ability to absorb variety) and provides specific information (ability to maintain specificity) about the members of these categories.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen that 'variety and specificity' can be considered in terms of the relation between a concept and a category. Depending on the categorization rules a concept provides, the corresponding category can allow more or less variety of its members and give more or less specific information about the members of that category. As we saw, in some cases there can be a tension between the variety of a category and its degree of specificity. Some categories allow a great variety but at the same time are vague (the category 'good' for instance).

In order to gain more insight in this issue, we have analysed the way in which a concept is structured internally and how it is related to other concepts within a network of concepts. In both cases (respectively the internal and external structure) an ICM can be used to analyse this structure. Different types of ICMs typify different kinds of structures of a network of (sub)concepts. Dependent on that structure, different categorization rules apply. As different ways in which concepts can be structured, the different types of ICMs provide different kinds of categorization rules.

For instance, let's assume we want to categorize 'someone' as a 'mother'. Lakoff (1987: 83 – 84) has argued that the concept of mother is structured radially. In the radially defined conceptual structure of 'mother', there is one central case of 'mother'. This includes a mother who is and always has been female, and who gave birth to the child, supplied her half of the child's genes, nurtured the child, and is the child's legal guardian. All other mothers are extensions of this central 'mother', like 'stepmother', 'adoptive mother', 'natural mother', 'foster mother', 'surrogate mother' or 'unwed mother' (1987: 83). If we had to categorize 'someone' as mother, the – radially structured – ICM provides insight in the way this is done. If that 'someone' is not married for instance and gives birth to a child, she would be categorized – according to this ICM – as a deviation from the central case of 'mother'. She would be part of the category mother, but be characterized as a specific – more deviant – variant of the category 'mother'. Here, the concept 'unwed mother' in combination with the type of ICM it is characterized by, provides insight in the boundaries of a category (the woman falls within the boundaries of the category mother) and the specific information given to the members of that category (she is characterized as a more deviant member).

We can use these theoretical considerations about categories, concepts and ICMs to analyse the brand as a concept. More in particular, we will use them to design an instrument which can be used to investigate the categorization capacities of the normative brand concept used by the brand regulator in the regulation of the brander system.

As we will see in the next chapter, the normative brand concept is a complex internally structured concept. Moreover it is coupled to other concepts (for instance, concepts which refer to articles), within a network of concepts. We can assess the categorization rules provided by the normative concept by analysing both its internal and external structure. By analysing its structure, we can discover the abilities of the normative

brand concept for dealing with the variety – specificity dilemma; i.e. its abilities to allow a variety of provide specific information to the members of its corresponding categories.

CHAPTER 4

Brands as concepts

“Break the pattern that connects the subject material and you will inevitably destroy all quality”.

G. Bateson, 1979: 20

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we have discussed the nature of concepts and categorizations as a first step towards investigating the brand as a concept. In this chapter a second step will be taken by applying these insights to brands. Furthermore, the conceptual perspective on branding worked out in this chapter will provide a basis of our methods for empirical research.

The notion of categorization is not new in branding theory and practice. At the beginning of this chapter, we will illustrate this by discussing common branding practices and a particular kind of branding research. We will treat a specific branch of academic research that deals with the subject of our empirical research, the so called extension research. This research deals with the relationship between (new) products and brands. It is the most prominent scientific research that is concerned with the dilemma of variety and specificity and will be analysed from a categorization point of view.

Although some practices and research traditions produce without doubt insights into specific aspects of the variety/specificity dilemma, a further analysis shows that we need a different perspective on brands in order to answer our research questions. As we will see, these practices and theories apply categorization theory without relating it explicitly to concepts. What is needed is a perspective that relates branding not only to categorization, but to concepts as well. Such an approach helps to get insight in the actual organizing principles used by a brand to group products or services together. A new perspective on the brand is needed to pro-

vide more insight in the 'grouping abilities' of the brand. This perspective will be elaborated in this chapter by designing the building blocks for a method that can be used to analyse the conceptual structure of the brand.

Section 4.2. will discuss conceptions of the brand in relation to categorization. In section 4.3. a beginning is made to construct a conceptual approach to the brand. Section 4.4. and 4.5. will discuss the conceptual structure of the brand and the relationship between the different subconcepts of a brand. In section 4.6. we will end this chapter with some concluding remarks concerning the brand as a concept.

4.2 The brand as a categorization of products

4.2.1 Introduction

The most salient way by which the variety-specificity dilemma becomes manifest for branders is by the connection of new products to an existing brand. In general, products or services can be seen as the most common 'expressions' of variety in branding. Therefore, the most accessible way to analyse this dilemma is to investigate the relationship between brands and products.

The next paragraph (4.2.2) discusses a particular approach to the investigation of this relationship that combines categorization theory and branding by considering the brand as a category of products. In paragraph 4.2.3 the extension research on branding will be discussed from a categorization perspective. In paragraph 4.2.4, we will plead for a 'conceptual approach' to branding, enabling the study of aspects of branding which are not investigated by the conceptions described in the previous paragraphs.

4.2.2 The brand as a category of products

Brands and categorization can be related to each other in many ways. Categories are discussed by marketers mainly in terms of 'product categories' or 'categories of services'. A common way to regard a category in relation to branding is to see it as a *member* or subcategory of a product category. For instance, Coca Cola is considered as a member or subcategory of the product category 'soft drinks', Ford Fiesta as a member or subcategory of the product category 'cars' and Elmex as a member or subcat-

egory of the product category ‘toothpaste’. The membership of a brand (with)in a category is based on the fact that it belongs to a certain category of products. It represents specific product features that distinguishes it from other brands in that product category (having other product features). The main function of such a perspective is to give a brand a place among its competitors. From this perspective, a brand is a subcategory of a category of (competing) products.

Category of products	Category of products	Category of products
Brand 1	Brand 3	Brand 5
Brand 2	Brand 4	Brand 6

Figure 4.1 The brand as a part of a category of products

Although such an approach is used in branding practice, there are two reasons why such a conception of brands is too restricted.

The *first* reason is related to our research objective, which concerns the determination of the boundaries of a brand in terms of the (variety of) products allowed under its name, while the brand maintains a certain specificity. From this perspective, it is convenient to regard the brand as ‘something’ that groups products together itself. If the brand is considered as a subcategory of a category of products, it is implied automatically that brands are ‘kinds of products’ instead of a reflection of the principles behind the ordering of products.

Secondly, it is hard to grasp the unity of a brand by considering it a subcategory of a product category. Many brands as well as their competitors are members of more than one product category alone. The brand Philips sells more than 30.000 different products under its name and is active in more than 200 product categories (Franzen, 2000: 162). It is hard to define the unity of the brand Philips by defining it as part of a product category; it would give a perception of the brand that is fragmented in 200 pieces.

Even by elevating the analysis of the brand to an industry level, it is

hard to grasp the unity of the brand in terms of a subcategory. Below, the brand Philips is depicted as being a member of a particular industry category, named the digital industry space (Hamel & Prahalad, 1994: 41):

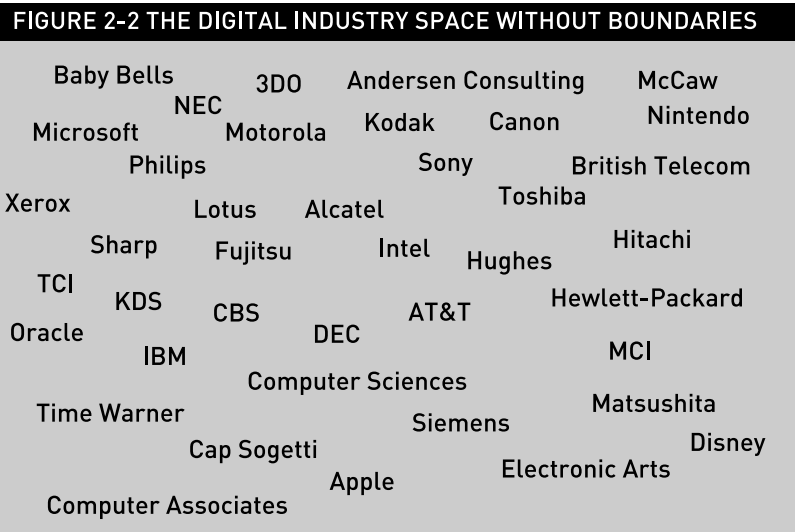


Figure 4.2 Philips as a part of the ‘digital industry space’

This categorization of a brand among other brands at an industry level in itself has also disadvantages.

Firstly, the industry as a category can encompass all products of a brand, but the boundaries of industries are hard to draw and not fixed at all. As Prahalad & Hamel (1994) argue: “It’s not that difficult to determine who’s making soft drinks, for example, and who is not. But where does the digital industry begin and end? Or the genetics industry? Or the entertainment industry? Or the retail financial services industry? (1994: 40).” So, to define the brand as part of an industry category making it possible to ‘position’ a brand that bears a variety of products. However, the vague boundaries of such a category make it an unreliable platform for the definition of a brand’s unity.

Secondly, brands draw different boundaries than those related to existing products or services related to the brand (i.e. industry boundaries). Strong brands determine their own boundaries that are not based on existing products and services: “To create the future a company must (1) change in some fundamental way the rules of engagement in a long-standing industry (as Charles Schwab did in the brokerage and mutual

fund business), (2) redraw the boundaries between industries (as Time Warner, Electronic Arts, and other companies are attempting to do in the field of 'edutainment'), and/or (3) create entirely new industries (as Apple did in personal computers). A capacity to invent new industries and reinvent old ones is a prerequisite for getting the future first and a precondition for staying out in front (Hamel & Prahalad, 1994)."

Brands can play a role in establishing categorizations that exceed existing industry boundaries⁶⁶. To understand the brand as providing criteria for categorization, we need to adopt a perspective that makes it possible to see the brand as a grouping (a category) in itself.

One of the few authors who have treated the brand as a self sufficient category is Boush (Boush, 1993; Boush & Loken, 1991)⁶⁷. He considers the brand itself as an autonomous category of products. Boush's approach puts the brand itself in the centre of attention and considers it as a 'binding force' of a particular kind.

The brand in Boush's view is a grouping device for products. As he argues: "A brand can represent a category that consists of the products it makes. In this new context, a brand name such as Hershey's is the label for a category of products that are sold under that name. The category 'Hershey's products' includes chocolate bars, candy kisses, and chocolate milk (1993: 299)." He continues by arguing: "The first requirement of a category is that its members be equivalent in some way. Brand categories seem to fulfil this requirement because the use of a common brand name signals some kind of equivalence to consumers. For example, the phrase 'This is a Sony' implies a kind of equivalence in expectations among Sony products (1993: 303)." In other words, a brand like Sony is a category of different products that are 'identical' in some respect, like televisions, radios and hifi units.

Boush's analysis can be considered as a breakthrough in relating branding to categorization because it represents a shift from the brand as a subcategory (or member) of a product category, to the brand as being a category in itself:

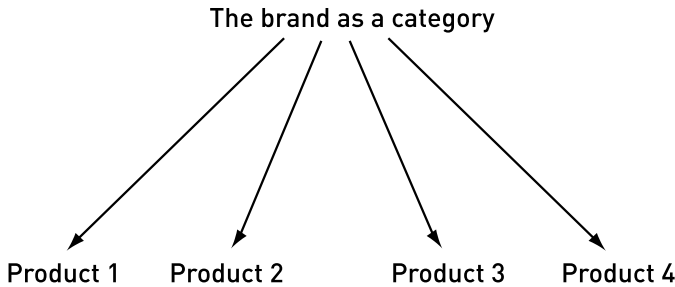


Figure 4.3 *The brand as a category of products*

However, the perception of the brand as a category of products does not yet say much about the organizing principles underlying categorization. If the brand is a category of products, by what principle does it ascribe equivalence to products and services? As the discussion of Prahalad & Hamel indicated, understanding these principles is of key importance for defining the unity of a brand over product categories and in industries with fuzzy boundaries.

We will start our investigation of these unifying principles of brands by simply investigating the aspects shared by the different products of a certain brand. According to Boush, a brand as a category draws equivalence upon products because it: “serves as a cue to : (a) product quality, (b) product attributes, and (c) product benefits (1993: 309).” These are all features that indicate aspects of products. By considering products as members of the same category, he implies, these products are all considered as sharing certain ‘aspects’. The question is whether these aspects put forward by Boush are the only aspects that can possibly be shared by the products of a brand.

In the next paragraph, this question will be investigated.

4.2.3 The aspects shared by the products of a brand: a brief overview of extension research

4.2.3.1 Introduction

In this paragraph, we will analyse existing branding research to observe the ways in which brands can ‘bind’ together (a variety of) products. More in particular, we will focus on the so called ‘extension research’ that has been conducted into the relationship between brand and product. It is

concerned with the analysis of consumer evaluations of brand extensions. It studies how consumers evaluate the relationship between the brand and (new) products under the brand name⁶⁸.

From a categorization point of view, one could make a distinction between different kinds of extension research because these studies are different in the assumptions about how brands group together products. More in particular, they differ with respect to their assumptions about the aspects a brand can use to draw equivalence upon these products. On the one hand there is a group of researchers that assumes that a brand stands for certain product features (physical and functional products characteristics) which are shared by the products of that brand. On the other hand, there is a group of extension researchers who assume that a brand does not only stand for these product features, but also embodies more symbolic features which can be shared by the products.

In branding literature, different distinctions exist about what kind of features a brand can represent (Rokeach, 1968, 1973; Franzen, 1998: 66-68; Pieters, 1989; Keller, 1993). These distinctions distinguish between features which are related to a product, features which relate to the product use and features which relate to the domain of products only indirectly.

For instance, Keller (1993: 4) makes a distinction between attributes and benefits. Attributes are: "...descriptive features that characterize a product or a service." Among these are product related attributes and non-product related attributes. The first: "are defined as the ingredients necessary for performing the product or service functions sought by consumers. Hence, they relate to a product's physical composition or service's requirements (1993: 4)." The second, the non-product related attributes: "are defined as external aspects of the product or service that relate to its purchase or consumption (1993: 4)." Benefits are: "...the personal value consumers attach to the product or service attributes-that is what consumers think the product or service can do for them." There are three kinds of benefits: functional benefits, experiential benefits and symbolic benefits. Functional benefits: "are the most intrinsic advantages of product or service consumption and usually correspond to the product related attributes." (...) "Experiential benefits relate to what it feels like to use the product or service and also usually correspond to the product related attributes. These benefits satisfy experiential needs such as sensory pleasure, variety and cognitive stimulation. Symbolic benefits are the most extrinsic advantages of product or service consumption. They usu-

ally correspond to non-product-related attributes and relate to underlying needs for social approval or personal expression and out directed self esteem (1993:4).”

This classification of Keller can be related to another classification by Franzen, used in the description of the Zwitsal brand:

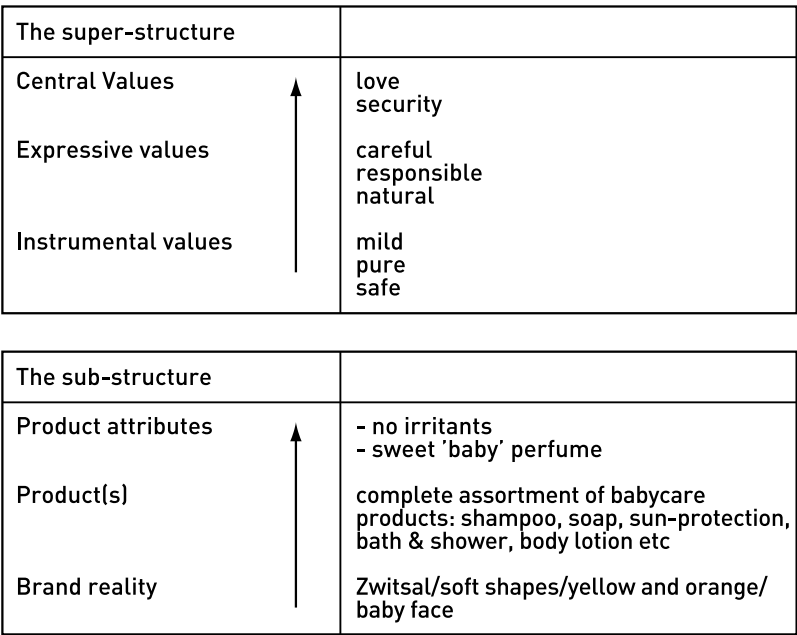


Figure 4.4 Value hierarchy of Zwitsal (source: Mosmans, 1995)

This picture of the brand Zwitsal identifies different kinds of ‘features’. The attributes, like Keller’s distinction, indicate the product properties of the brand. Like Keller’s functional benefits, the instrumental values (mild, safe in use) are directly related to the way the product properties are used. In this thesis, these kinds of features will be called product features.

Like Keller’s experiential benefits, the expressive values are features which do not necessarily have to be related directly to product properties. These are features (careful, responsible) which are not related to the ‘product domain’, they are defined in relation to a different domain, i.e. the domain of love and security. These features, we will call symbolic features.

In the next paragraph, we will discuss further the extension researchers by dividing them into one group that assumes that products of a brand can be bound together by product features. This group of extension researchers will be discussed in paragraph 4.2.3.2.. The other group of researchers assumes that products can be bound by a brand on the basis of symbolic features as well. This group will be discussed in paragraph 4.2.3.3.

4.2.3.2 The brand that stands for product features

The extension studies that belong to this group consider the brand as standing for particular product features carried by the different products of a brand. These extension studies can again be divided into two sub-groups. The first group investigates the influence of the product features embodied by the brand on the evaluation of extensions (products added to an existing brand). These studies consider the brand as an independent variable. The second group focuses on the influence of the products on the evaluation of the product features contained by the brand, i.e. the brand as a dependant variable.

1a The brand as a independent variable

This kind of study investigates aspects of a brand that contribute to a positive evaluation of products of a brand. It argues that a positive evaluation of extensions by consumers depends on (a) the quality of the brand and (b) the *fit* between the brand and the new article (extension). These two aspects of the brand are brought up as success factors for the evaluation of brand extensions by customers.

Classical studies of consumer evaluations of brand extensions, which fall into this first group, are those by Aaker & Keller (1990), Sunde & Brodie (1993), Reddy, Holak and Bhat, (1994) and Bottomley & Doyle (1996). The aspects they assume the brand carries are product properties and functional features. With respect to the first, the authors assume that brands can group together products by quality⁶⁹ and by properties referring to the way a product is manufactured⁷⁰. The second aspect refers to the ways a product is used. Among these are features that represent the same need or have a common application or use context⁷¹.

1b The brand as a dependent variable

The second subgroup that considers the brand to consist of product

aspects investigates these aspects in reverse relationship compared to the group above. This group of research analyses the way in which the products influence the evaluation of the brand.

There are authors, who investigate the influence of particular unsuccessful products (brand extensions) on the evaluation of the brand. Among these are Keller & Aaker (1992) and Romeo (1991)⁷². Other authors investigate whether the failure of particular brand extensions dilutes particular aspects of the brand. Among these are Loken & John (1993) and John, Loken & Joiner (1998)⁷³.

The studies in this group assume that the products of a brand share product properties. John & Roedder (1993) analysed two aspects of a brand which could be influenced by an unsuccessful brand extension: 'gentleness and quality' (1993:74). These are properties of particular products, shampoo and facial tissue. In the study by John, Loken & Joiner (1998) product properties were also the object of the study, such as gentleness in relation to shampoo (1993: 25); the attribute of hygiene in relation to mouthwash products and first aid swabs (1993: 25).

The brand in these studies is a bundle of product properties that can be diluted by the fact that new products are linked to the brand.

4.2.3.3 The brand that stands for product as well as symbolic features

The second group of extension studies not only considers the brand to stand for product features (product properties or functional features) alone, but suggests that there are also other features that can be shared by the products of a brand. One of the representatives of this group is Kapferer. He criticizes one of the representatives of the extension research (Aaker & Keller, 1992) dealt with above: "The model ignores the fact that, in most cases, it is the brand itself which creates the link between the diverse products to which it is applied. Looking at a list of products (perfume, shoes, portfolio, shirt, bag, pen, crystal, ring, watch, belt, tie), they may not seem to have much in common. However, as soon as one knows that it is Gucci perfume, Gucci shoes, a Gucci portfolio, etc., the same products fit together. The brand values endow them with commonality and togetherness (1992: 130)." As this quotation suggests, the products of a brand do not have to share product features, they can also share symbolic features.

There is a group of extension researchers that does take into consideration the fact that products can share symbolic features. This group can

be divided into two subgroups again. The first subgroup investigates the influence of symbolic features on the evaluation of brand extensions. This group considers the brand as independent variable. The second group analyses the brand as a dependant variable by investigating how the evaluation of a brand extension influences the perception of symbolic features of the brand.

2a. The brand as an independent variable

In this group of research, the products of a brand are not considered as sharing only physical or functional characteristics, but symbolic features as well.

Research by Park, Milsberg & Lawson, (1991) provides an example of this approach. It suggests that brands can have abstract meanings, which they call brand concepts: "Brand concepts position products in the minds of consumers and differentiate given products from other brands in the same product category" (...) "Brand concepts are brand-unique abstract meanings (e.g. high status) that typically originate from a particular configuration of products features (e.g.. high price, expensive-looking design etc.) and a firm's efforts to create meanings from these arrangements (e.g. 'the relentless pursuit of perfection' by Lexus) (1991: 186)."

Unlike the extension research of the previous paragraph, this kind of research assumes that brands can carry symbolic features by which they are able to 'bind' a variety of products together. These features are not the properties of a product (product properties) neither do they refer to the use of products (functional features). They are related to a domain that is different from the product domain, for instance the concept 'high status'.

2b. The brand as a dependent variable

Finally, there is a group of extension research that also presupposes that the extensions of a brand can share some symbolic features, but now considers the brand as a dependant variable. It investigates the influence of the evaluation of a certain product on the evaluation of the brand. An example of this research is provided by Kirmani, Sood & Bridges (1999). They investigate the risk of dilution of the perceptions of the brand name under the influence of a new line extension⁷⁴. Among the brands they investigate there are so-called prestige brands. Prestige brands "... are bought primarily for status and exclusivity reasons (1999: 88)." In the operationalization of the possible effect of a new product on the evaluation of such a prestige brand (in their research it was BMW), they focused

on two features: luxury and prestige (1999: 92). The features ‘luxurious and prestige’ are symbolic features. These are not product properties or functional features. They are not just connected to a domain of products, but relate first and foremost to a particular way of life and particular kinds of consumers that are attracted by such features.

In this paragraph, we have argued that viewed from the analysis of extension research, products of a brand can be ‘grouped together by a brand’ on the basis of different kinds of ‘aspects’. Different kinds of extension research hold different assumptions about the aspects that can be shared by the products of the brand. Some assume that they can share product properties and functional features, other imply that the products of a brand share symbolic features. The first directly relate to the domain of products, while the latter ones do not. In summary:

	Direction of casual relationship	
Aspects shared by products		
	Brand as independent variable	Brand as dependent variable
Product features (products properties and functional features)	Aaker & Keller, 1990; Sunde & Brodie; 1993; Reddy, Holak and Bhat, 1994; Bottomley & Doyle, 1996	Keller & Aaker, 1991; Romeo, 1992; Loken & John, 1993; John, Loken & Joiner, 1998
Symbolic features	Keller & Aaker, 1997; Park, Milsberg & Lawson, 1991	Kirmani, Sood & Bridges, 1999

In the previous section, we argued that brands can be understood as categories: as groupings of products that share certain aspects. Apparently, the different studies of extension research have different assumptions about these aspects. These studies have assumptions about how a brand can treat different products as the same.

Although the overview of extension research shows that various products of a brand can be grouped together by different kinds of aspects, the separate studies do not investigate exactly how these groupings are established. The perception and evaluation of either the separate added products (extensions) or the brand as a whole is their object of investigation. Neither the actual grouping of products nor the principles behind its establishment are investigated by them in detail. In the next paragraph

we will argue that – in order to get insight in this – a different perspective on brands is needed.

4.2.4 From extension research to intentional analysis: the need for a conceptual approach to branding

As discussed above, the approach to branding developed by Boush considers the brand as a category. The brand represents a category of ‘things’ in the sense that it ascribes some equivalence to the knowledge and expectations people have of the products of that brand. The advantage of his approach – for our way of thinking – is that a brand is seen as a ‘grouping’. As such, it enables us to think of it as something which determines the boundaries for variety. However, the approach by Boush focuses on a category as an actual grouping. The organizing principles underlying that grouping do not come into focus. For this, a conceptual approach of the brand is needed that emphasizes the principles which underlie categorization. Insight in these organizing principles, and hence the extension of Boush’ approach, provides an alternate way of investigating the variety/specificity dilemma. Unlike ‘extension research’, it is explicitly focused on the ‘intentional side’ of branding: the ‘grouping ability’ of a brand. Taking that as a starting point for analysis, insight can be provided into the degree in which variety is allowed and specificity is preserved.

Moreover, insight in a brand’s capacity to categorize is useful because evidence has shown that it influences the way customers evaluate the products of a brand. As research shows, the evaluation of the products of a brand by customers is not only based on the actual physical or functional similarities shared by these products, but also on the capacity of the brand to treat products as ‘somehow’ being similar. As Park, Milberg & Lawson argue: “The results reveal that in identifying brand extensions, consumers take into account not only information about the product-level feature similarity between the new product and the products already associated with the brand, but also the concept consistency between the brand concept and the extension (Park, Milberg, Lawson, 1991: 185).” As the quote suggests, consumers do not only categorize products of a brand by the actual similarities between these products, but also with the help of the concept that is provided by the brand. So, one can argue that the brand should be treated as a concept that is related to the products in various ways. As the authors illustrate: “For example, consider the product category “toys” as a possible extension of the brands McDonalds

or Wendy's. At the level of products features, toys are clearly dissimilar to hamburgers. However, in the light of McDonalds' new advertising campaign and slogan, 'food, folks and fun' toys may be perceived as a more appropriate extension than for Wendy's. This follows because McDonalds' brand concept would be consistent with the 'fun', that is associated with toys (1991: 186)." So, the abstract concept 'fun' helps to 'organize' different kinds of products of the brand. Fun is a concept which provides a source of equivalence that helps to categorize various kinds of products⁷⁵. Based on this research, one can conclude that the difficulty as well as the success of branding must lie in the finding of new relevant principles by which products, services, consumers, competitors and even industries can be 'grouped together'.

Moreover, a conceptual approach to branding can deepen the insight into brand extensions offered by the extension research. This research proclaims that aspects like 'social responsibility' or 'status', or arrangements like 'the relentless pursuit of perfection' can play an important role in the evaluation of a brand extension by consumers, but it does not provide insight in the nature of these concepts. Unlike this research, a conceptual approach to branding can help to investigate the nature of particular 'binding principles', such as these more symbolic features.

In other words, there are several reasons to apply a conceptual approach to branding. In the next four sections, we will propose such an approach by presenting a theoretical framework which enables us to investigate the brand as a concept. This framework is based on the insights elaborated in chapter 3.

4.3 The conceptual structure of the brand

4.3.1 *Introduction*

In this section we will discuss a model that lays down a framework for analysing the conceptual structure of the brand. The framework can be used to study 'the grouping ability' of a brand.

First of all, we will discuss the nature of such a brand concept (4.3.2.). As we will see, the brand concept is a network of concepts which is built up from different levels. In the second place, we will discuss the explicit normative brand concept as a specific kind of conceptual network, an Ide-

alized Cognitive Model (ICM) (4.3.3.). As we will argue, the explicit normative brand concept, or brand identity, is an ICM which serves as a frame of reference for other concepts, like the article concepts. In the third place, we will discuss the internal structure (4.3.4.) of the brand identity concepts and the brand article concepts. The analysis of the relationships between the levels will be discussed in section 4.4..

4.3.2 *The brand concept as a multi-level network of concepts.*

Before we discuss the brand as a network of concepts, we should first summarize what we have seen so far. We have argued that there is a correspondence between a concept and a category. It is by means of the concept chair that we know that a particular object can be classified as a chair. The concept helps us to categorize objects as chairs. The category chair refers to the set of objects we would call chairs. So, for every concept there is a category of 'objects'. To understand how we categorize, we have to know the corresponding concept. The concept provides rules for categorization. Moreover, to understand the categorization rules of a concept an understanding is needed of how this concept is structured internally, and how it is related to other concepts within a network of concepts. This structure can be characterized by an Idealized Cognitive Model (ICM). An ICM is a network of (sub)concepts. There are different types of ICM's which all characterize different ways in which a network of (sub)concepts can be structured.

Our aim is to study the brander's concept of the brand. More in particular, to study the concept the brand regulator uses in the process of regulating the brander system. Like the brand, the brander's concept of the brand is a network of different (sub)concepts.

Let's consider for instance the brand concept of a particular brand, Apple. As Kapferer (1992: 51) has analysed, the brand Apple stands for a number of aspects:

- In the most direct way, Apple stands for microcomputers, *easy access, all purposes*
- It has a *creative, intelligent and cool* personality
- It stands for *liberation, friendliness*
- It incorporates values like '*Changing the organization, New humanism, California's new frontier*
- It identifies with *young-minded autonomous people*
- People using Apple are supposed to seek *self-enhancement*

The words which are marked *italic* are concepts which are part of the brand concept of Apple. The brand Apple is not just one concept, it is a conceptual network. This conceptual network defines a particular category of products. In the figure below, we see a number of these subconcepts, which are all connected to each other in a particular way. These interrelated subconcepts together define a particular category of Apple microcomputers:

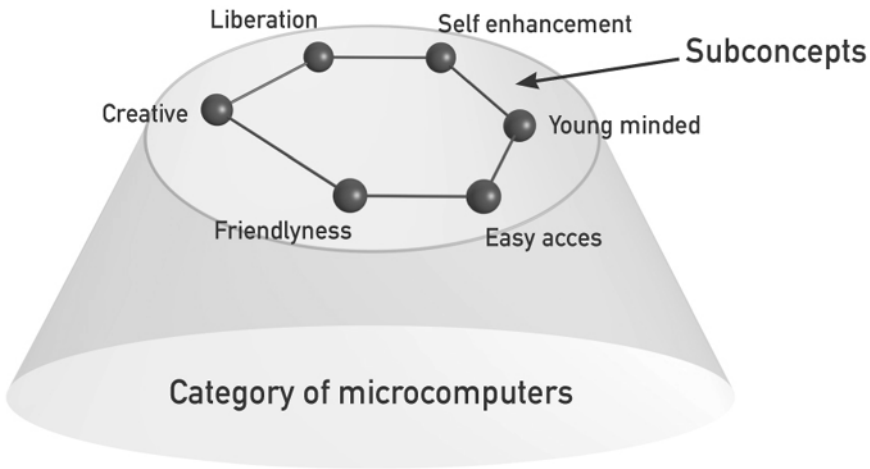


Figure 4.5 The brander's concept of the brand Apple (1)

The subconcepts that are the building blocks of the brand concept of Apple provide particular categorization rules. The subconcepts represent features that define a particular kind of product (the category of Apple microcomputers). In that sense, the internal structure of the concept is defined by a feature bundle ICM, corresponding with a particular category of products.

However, 'Apple' has different kinds of products attached to its brand. These different products highlight particular aspects of the brand. As Aaker argues: "From the beginning, an Apple computer's greatest assets were its fun personality and its user friendliness. The Apple Macintosh was thought to be for the home or school (where a playful, casual spirit was appropriate), or it was for specialized advertising or design situations (where offbeat people needed to be creative). Even physically, the Macintosh did not look like it would fit into a business environment. As a result, Apple struggled for a decade to be taken seriously in the corporate world,

which was at that time for a comfortable IBM feel and look. A partial solution for Apple was to create the Mac Quadra line of computers. The Mac Quadra associations have softened the strong Apple personality, making it more accessible to business settings and applications (1997: 254)."

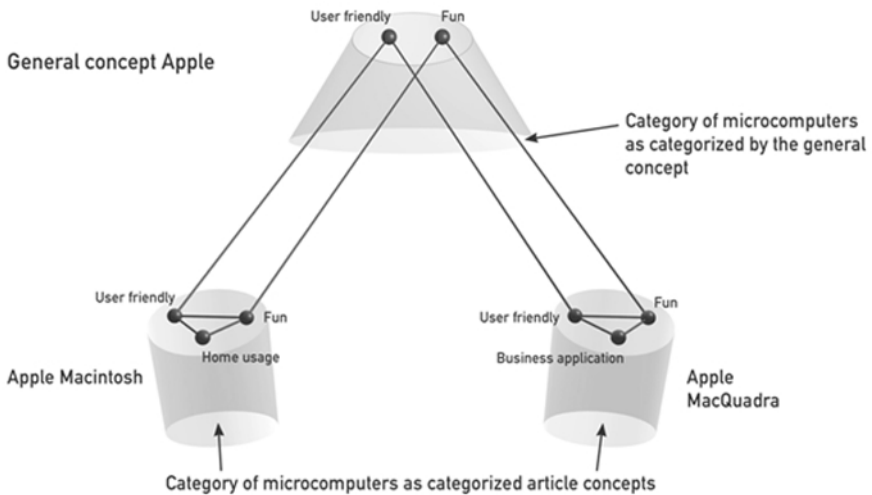


Figure 4.6. The brander's concept of the brand Apple (2)

As this quotation indicates, the conceptual structure of the brand Apple falls apart in two concepts somehow, designating two kinds of articles: a concept of Apple Macintosh and of Mac Quadra. The brand concept of Apple can be represented as a network of at least two kinds of concepts. On the one hand, the concept of Apple is general and represents the overall characteristics of the brand. On the other hand, the brand concept consists of two article concepts which share these characteristics, but also have characteristics of their own.

As figure 4.6. shows, the brand concept of Apple can be represented as consisting of two levels: a level of the article concepts and a level of a more general concept. These levels differ from each other in some respects, but at the same time they all indicate the brand Apple. The general concept of Apple consists of features defining a category of microcomputers. The article concepts are defined by feature bundles; they consist of subconcepts which are features that define a more specific category of products.

Although the article concepts differ from each other, they are all un-

mistakably Apple. They have a certain 'Appleness' in common. This 'Appleness' is defined by the more general part of the conceptual structure of Apple. The article concepts add specific features to that. Together with the 'Apple commonality' defined by the general concept, these specific features of the article concepts define the category of products which correspond with these article concepts. As Aaker suggests, the Apple Macintosh represents features like user friendliness and fun personality. Together with features like 'used for school and home' these features define the category of products corresponding with the article concept Apple Macintosh. The article concept Mac Quadra holds particular features like 'used for business settings'. These features, together with features of the general brand concept of Apple, define the category of business computers corresponding with the article concept Mac Quadra.

Service brands also have such a multi-layered conceptual structure. Instead of products, the conceptual structure includes concepts designating services. These concepts consist of subconcepts that are feature bundles defining a particular category of services or a particular category of places where one can find the service (hotel, restaurant). If a service brand has more of these service concepts attached to its name, a general concept exists. This general concept corresponds with a category of all the services which are defined by the separate service concepts. The general concept is built up from subconcepts which are features defining that category.

An example of such a service brand is 'Forte Hotels Group' in Britain. It is discussed by Aaker (1997, 252). Forte Group is a group of hotels covering a wide spectrum of accommodation types, ranging from basic to luxury. In 1989 Forte decided to develop five distinct article concepts all under the Forte hotel brand:

- the Forte Travellodge. Roadside budget hotels that offer simple, modern rooms and are conveniently situated along major routes.
- Forte Posthouse. Accesible three-star modern hotels offering comfortable rooms, good restaurants and meeting facilities at competitive prices.
- Forte Crest. High quality modern business hotels that specialise in personal service and are mostly situated in major city centres around Europe.
- Forte Heritage. A collection of traditional British inns offering a combination of comfort, personal hospitality, and character.
- Forte Grand. A collection of first class international hotels offering traditional European standards of comfort, style and service.

These different kinds of hotels represent different concepts that are comparable with article concepts corresponding with kinds of products. The only difference is that the concepts represent a kind of service or experience, instead of a kind of product. These different kinds of hotels all have different features, defining a particular kind (category) of hotel(s). The 'Forte brand' functions as a general concept. As Aaker (1997: 253) argues: "It may play an endorser role as customers look for credibility signals and demand consistency in service.. ." As the quotation indicates, the general concept of Forte consists of the subconcepts 'credibility' and 'consistent service'. In other words, it defines 'the Forte commonality'. The different 'service concepts' are specific 'kinds of service concepts' stemming from that commonality.

The concepts of most big brands, often have more levels of 'generality' than the two discussed above. The conceptual structure of a brand like General Motors for instance consists of a conceptual level corresponding with the company, a level corresponding to a particular car brand (Chevrolet), a particular line of cars (Chevrolet Lumina), and a particular car (sports coupe) (see: Aaker: 1997: 243)⁷⁶:

Corporate brand	General Motors	Nestlé
Range brand	Chevrolet	Carnation
Product line brand	Chevrolet Lumina	Carnation Instant Breakfast

So, the branders concept of the brand can be characterized as a multi-levelled network of concepts, consisting of different levels of 'generality'. At each level, the brand concepts have an internal structure which define a general category of products or services or a category of organizational characteristics in case of more general brand concepts and a more particular kind of products in case of the brand article concepts. Although the conceptual structure of a brand can be analysed and divided into different levels, our analysis of the conceptual brand will take place at two levels only: the level representing a general concept we will call the brand identity and the next level of an article concept. The reason why no further

elaboration has taken place is that we are mainly interested in the assessment of the conceptual consequences of the variety that can be absorbed by a brand concept. For this purpose, it satisfies to analyse the level of the more general concept and the way it is related to the article concepts.

In the next section, we will deal with the nature of a general concept, the 'brand identity' in greater detail.

4.3.3 The brand identity as an ICM providing a framework for article concepts

In chapter 2, we described a brand identity as an explicit normative brand concept. In this paragraph, we will describe the brand identity in greater depth. We will argue that the brand identity is an Idealized Cognitive Model, for it:

- is a 'stabilized' network of concepts (an ICM) which has proved to work and functions as a frame of reference for the article concepts
- is general
- is idealized

As we explained in section 3.4., the ICM is a network of stabilized concepts which 'have proven to work'. In the context of branding, an ICM can be seen as something which is built up in a process of constant interaction between brander and brand user. In this process, certain concepts are built up and related to each other. The brand identity can be considered as a particular network of concepts which plays a role in the stabilization of the brander system. It is stabilized by the communicative actions of the brand regulator. The brand regulator is the function making sure that the brander's operations are communicative actions reflecting a certain brand concept. As such, the communicative actions can build up, reinforce but also weaken a particular network of concepts.

The brand identity consists of related concepts and is used by the brand regulator, while interacting with its environment. In the definition by Kapferer the brand identity also indicates those aspects of the brand which should stay permanent. As Kapferer argues: "Brand core identity defines what must remain permanent, and also what may evolve (1992: 35)."

The brand identity is an ICM that works as a frame of reference for other concepts. In the example of the restaurant scenario in the previous chapter, for instance, we showed that it works as a frame of reference for

understanding the concept waiter and the corresponding category of waiters. The brand identity also functions as a frame of reference for article concepts and their corresponding categories. Let's return to the example of Kapferer. He has argued that the brand identity of Apple consists of subconcepts like creative, self enhancement, user friendly, fun. These concepts, which are related to each other in a particular way, function as a frame of reference for the article concept Apple Macintosh and the category of products it represents. The existing article concept Apple Macintosh is characterized relative to the brand identity of Apple. The category of products corresponding to the article concept Apple Macintosh can be characterized as 'computers used for home and school which are fun and user friendly'.

The brand identity is a stabilized network of concepts which provides a frame of reference for article concepts. As such, it can be used to find new articles which 'fit' these concepts of the brand identity. For instance, a new article concept of a computer can be evaluated whether it fits the concept that it is user friendly. In section 4.4., we will discuss in greater detail the 'fit' between the identity concept and article concepts by analysing the relationship between both.

As we described in the previous chapter, an ICM is general in the sense that it can be applied to different kinds of situations. Its realm of applicability exceeds a particular situation or event. The brand identity, also, has to be applicable for different kinds of situations. First of all, it has to go beyond the status of a single article. It functions as a frame of reference for more different article concepts. Secondly, it is generalized. It consists of generalized cognitive, behavioural and preference patterns. Because it can be applied for different kinds of situations, it is able to function as a source for a variety of interactions between brander and brand users.

Finally, a brand identity is not only general, it also is idealized. The brand identity is idealized because it reflects those brand concepts which are preferred by the brander. It reflects the brander's ideal of the brand; the shared generalized brand concept as it is preferred by the brander.

So, our assumption in the investigation of the brand – in which the brand identity plays a crucial part – is to:

- 1 ... consider the brand identity as an ICM. It represents an emergent unity (leading to a total impression) providing a frame of reference for and defining the 'commonality' between the article concepts.
- 2 ... consider the brander's conceptual network as a whole as an emergent unity; i.e. as an ICM. The brand identity and article concepts to-

gether provide a total impression as well. They can be analysed by considering them as an ICM, having a certain structure.

We are interested especially in the structure of the brand identity. In paragraph 4.3.5., we will investigate this by analysing how the brand identity and the different article concepts are related to each other. To be able to analyse the relationship between the brand identity concept and the article concepts, it is crucial to analyse the internal structure of both. As we will see, specific concepts within the internal structure of the brand identity can be related to specific elements within the internal structure of the article concepts. In the next paragraph, we will shed a light on these elements by investigating the internal structure of the brand identity and the article concepts.

4.3.4 *The internal structure of the brand identity ICM and the article concepts.*

4.3.4.1 The internal structure of the brand identity ICM

In the example of Apple, the brand identity concept was represented as consisting of different subconcepts, all related to each other (user friendliness, fun, self enhancement, etc.). These subconcepts are characterized as features. As such they can define a particular category of 'things'. For instance, the concepts of which the Apple brand identity consists, define a category of Apple microcomputers.

The concepts of a brand identity can correspond with different kinds of categories:

- A category of *products* bearing the properties defined by the feature bundles. This category comprises all the kinds of products defined by the article concepts to which the brand identity is related. In the example of Apple, the brand identity of Apple defines a category of microcomputers. This category comprises all the products by Apple.
- A category of *services* bearing the properties defined by the feature bundles. This category comprises all kinds of services defined by the service concepts to which the brand identity is related. In our example of Forte hotels, all the different hotels share the properties of the brand identity ICM of Forte: 'reliability' and 'consistency in service'.
- A category of *brand users* bearing the properties defined by the feature bundles of the brand identity. As the example by Kapferer illus-

trated, the brand Apple also consists of features defining particular kind of people: people who are young minded, autonomous, and seek self enhancement (1992: 51).

- A category of characteristics that are related to an organization (culture of region or company). These are properties defined by the feature bundles of the brand identity. The brand identity has subconcepts that can reflect the region where the company behind the brand was founded: "Apple is the product of Californian culture (Kapferer, 1992:44)." Other brands have core concepts which designate the culture of the company: "Citroen' culture stems from its typical engineers ideal-progress through the application of science (Kapferer, 1992:45)."

It is possible that particular concepts of the brand identity ICM are more related to a particular category of products, while other concepts are more related to another category of products.

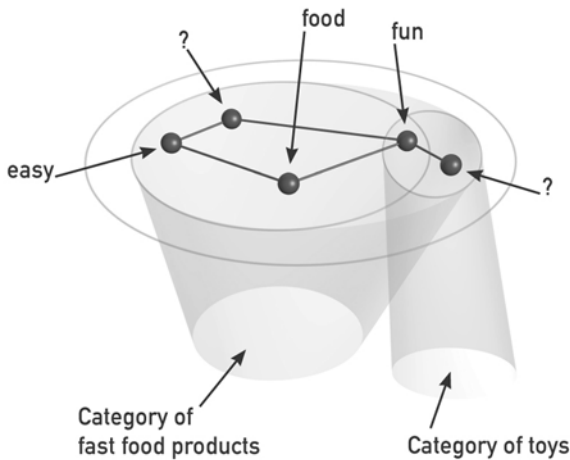


Figure 4.7 The brand identity of McDonalds

An example of this is provided by McDonalds. Figure 4.7. depicts three concepts which are part of the brand identity of McDonalds, consisting of three concepts: fun, food quality and easy (Park, Milberg, Lawson, 1991: 186). The concepts food and easy and fun define a category of particular kinds of products, hamburgers. The concept fun in itself (with or without being related to other concepts) is more related to a particular other cat-

egory of products, in this case a category of toys.

The definition of a category of products is never strictly dependant on one subconcept in particular. The brand identity – as an emergent unity – defines the category of products corresponding to the network of concepts. However, as this example illustrates it is possible that some (sub)concepts have a more dominant role in the definition of some categories of products and other (sub) concepts in the definition of other categories of products.

Moreover, concepts of the brand identity differ with respect to the part they have in defining the overall meaning of the brand. As brands evolve, some concepts tend to define the essence of the brand, while others have a less important role in defining that essence. Against the background of the variety/ specificity dilemma it is important to determine which concepts have to be stable and may evolve. That is why our model of the conceptual structure of the brand identity distinguishes between concepts of the brand identity which are core and concepts which are peripheral.

Aaker makes a similar distinction between different elements of a brand identity. He distinguishes between the *core* identity and the *extended* identity: "The core identity represents the timeless essence of the brand (...) "The core identity, which is central to both the meaning and success of the brand, contains associations that are most likely to remain constant as the brand travels to new markets and products (1996:85-86)." (...) "The extended brand identity includes elements that provide texture and completeness. It fills in the picture, adding details that help portray what the brand stands for (1996:87-88)."

Aaker's distinction between the core identity and the extended identity makes a difference between concepts of the brand identity which are central to defining its essence and others. We will call the concepts which are strategically the most important concepts, as perceived by the brander, the core concepts of the brand identity. They also concern the core identity in Aaker's terms. Those concepts which are less important in defining the essence of the brand, but still support the core concepts, will be called peripheral concepts.

The internal structure of the brand identity is depicted in figure 4.8.

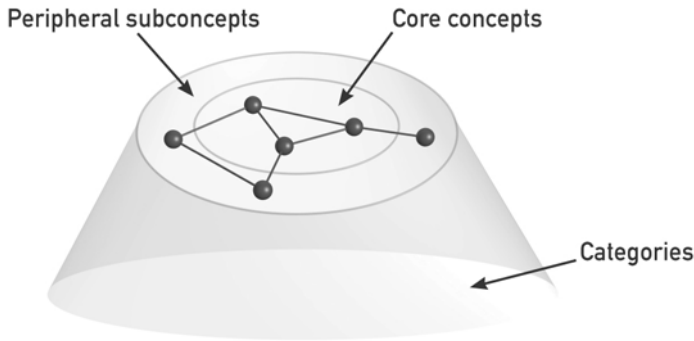


Figure 4.8 The internal structure of the brand identity concept

The concepts depicted in the inner circle represent the strategically most important concepts, the core concepts. They are related to each other in a particular way. The concepts in the outer circle are the peripheral concepts; the concepts which are less important for the definition of essence of the brand.

4.3.4.2 The internal structure of the brand article concepts.

The internal conceptual structure of the article concept concerns a bundle of features of products that can be characterized as a feature bundle ICM. The article concept consists of different subconcepts which all represent features. Where the features of an identity ICM define a category of in principle all sort of 'things', among which products, the features of an article concept define a category of products alone. The article concept Apple Macintosh defines a category of particular computers for home and school usage by particular features such as user friendliness and fun.

As the McDonalds example illustrated, different concepts of a brand identity ICM can define different categories of products (hamburgers and toys). This is not possible in case of the article concept. The subconcepts of the article concept define one category of products together. All the subconcepts of the article concept together represent the properties needed to define category membership.

Like in the case of the brand identity concept, not all subconcepts within the conceptual structure of the brand article concept, have the same status. We can distinguish two kinds of subconcepts of the article concepts: *distinctive* subconcepts and *peripheral* subconcepts.

In the first case, there are features, or the combination of features which represent the properties of the products that are considered to differentiate the articles from competitors and from other articles of the brand. In our example of Apple Macintosh, this properly would be the combination of features 'user friendly' and 'fun'⁷⁷. These concepts are called the central distinctive subconcepts of the article concept.

In the second case, the article concept consists of subconcepts (features) or a combination of them, that represent properties which are considered to be important for defining the category of products, but which are not stressed to differentiate the article from articles of competitors, nor from other products of the brand. These subconcepts will be called the peripheral subconcepts. In case of the Apple Macintosh, the 'memory characteristic' of the microcomputer was a peripheral subconcept. This is depicted in figure 4.9.

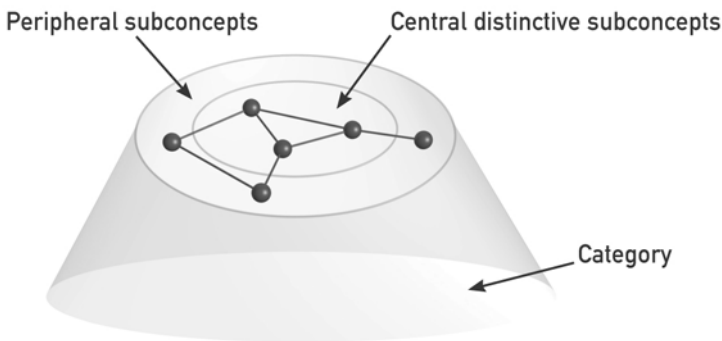


Figure 4.9 The internal structure of the article concept

4.4 Relationships between concepts

4.4.1 Introduction

In the previous two sections, we have analysed the way in which the article concept and identity ICM are structured internally. We have identified two layers within a conceptual structure of the brand that is used by the brand regulator. The first layer, the brand identity, can be considered as providing certain boundaries for variety, for instance the products and services that can be attached to the brand. The second layer embodies the

variety itself; the concepts that correspond with the actual category of products attached to the brand. For the investigation of the variety/specificity dilemma it is crucial to analyse the relationship between the source providing the boundaries (the brand identity) and the (potential) variety itself (in this case the article concepts).

In this section we will identify the relationships between these two layers that can be investigated to gain more insight in the variety / specificity dilemma.

In paragraph 4.4.2 we will discuss the relationship between the separate (sub) concepts of the identity concept and the article concept. This relationship will be characterized in terms of the *links* between the core concepts of the identity concepts and the central distinctive subconcepts of the article concepts. These different 'links' pertain to the degree to which the identity concept and the article concept have (sub) concepts in common. 'Strong links' will mean that both have subconcepts in common, whereas 'weak' links refer to the fact that they have less or no (sub)concepts in common.

In paragraph 4.4.3, the relationship between the core concepts and article concepts as a whole will be investigated. This relationship will be characterized in terms of the different *types of ICMs*, which we discussed in section 3.6. The characterization of this relationship by these different types of ICMs gives insight in the principles by which the brand identity concept and the article concept are connected to each other.

4.4.2 The relationship between the separate (sub)concepts of the identity concept and the article concept.

In this section, will discuss the relationship between the core concepts of the identity concept and the central distinctive subconcepts of the article concept. In figure 4.10, the relationship between the core concepts and the central distinctive subconcepts of the article concepts is displayed.

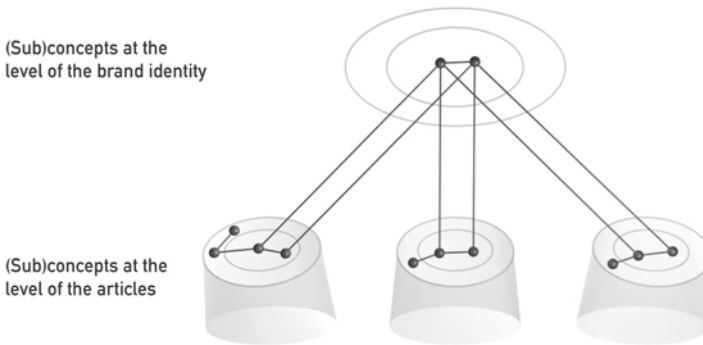


Figure 4.10 Relationship between (sub) concepts of the brand identity and article concepts

The relationship between the core concepts and the separate subconcepts of the article concepts will be analysed to assess the degree to which the first are part of the second. This will be analysed because we do want to know to what degree the core concepts of the brand identity can influence the conceptual structure of the article concepts. This relationship will be analysed by characterising it in terms of *links*. These links describe the degree to which the core concepts of the identity concept and the central distinctive subconcepts of the article concepts have subconcepts in common. Following Lakoff (1987: 423-426) we can indicate these degrees of commonality in terms of four types of possible links between the core concepts and the central distinctive subconcepts:

- 1 The instance link: the core concepts of the identity concept are all the same as the central distinctive subconcepts of the article concept (4.4.2.1.).
- 2 The similarity link: the central distinctive subconcepts of the article concepts share the same concepts with the core concepts and also have subconcepts of their own (4.4.2.2.).
- 3 The transformational link: at least one core concept is not represented at the article level and is only 'related to them', without being contradictory (4.4.2.3.).
- 4 The contradiction link: at least one core concepts is not represented at the article level and contradictory to (one of the) central distinctive subconcepts of the articles (4.4.2.4.).

4.4.2.1 The instance link

If the core concepts are linked to the central distinctive subconcepts by an instance link, both are linked directly to each other. The instance link is the strongest link between both. In this case (one of the) core concepts is equal to the central distinctive subconcept(s) of the article concept. Consider the case of Apple. If the central distinctive subconcepts of the article concept Apple Macintosh are all only core concepts (say, user friendliness and fun), the relationship between them is characterized as instance link.

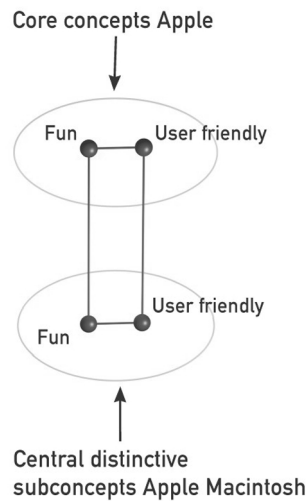


Figure 4.11 Instance link

In the figure above, the balls within the upper circle represent the core concepts. The balls within the under circle represent the central distinctive subconcepts of the article concept. In case of the instance link, both are the same.

4.4.2.2 The similarity link

If the core concepts are linked to the central distinctive subconcepts by an instance link, all central distinctive subconcepts are core concepts at the same time. This does not necessarily have to be the case. Consider the Apple microcomputer, Imac. The central distinctive subconcepts of its article concept are also part of the core concepts; user friendliness and fun. How-

ever, this IMac also comes in different colours. The aspect 'colour' is not part of the core concepts, yet it is a subconcept which is considered as a distinctive aspect relative to competitors.

In this case, the core concepts of Apple are not the only central distinctive subconcepts (at least the concept 'colour' is not). In that case, the relationship between the core concepts and the article concepts is named a similarity link.

The similarity link reflects a relationship in which all core concepts are represented at the level of the article concepts as central distinctive subconcepts, next to other central distinctive subconcepts.

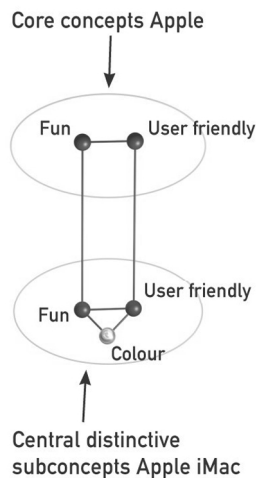


Figure 4.12 The similarity link

In the figure above, one of the balls is coloured white. This represents the central distinctive subconcept of the article concept that is different from the core concepts ('colour').

4.4.2.3 The transformational link

In case of a 'transformational link' not all the core concepts are the same as the central distinctive subconcepts. At least one of the core concepts is not represented at the article level as a central distinctive subconcepts and is "just" related to them.

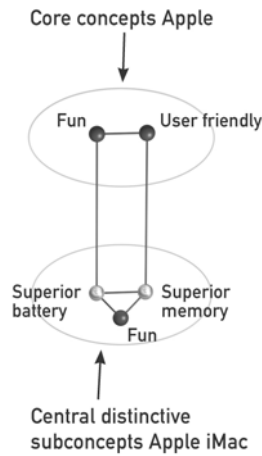


Figure 4.13. The transformational link

Imagine that Apple was to introduce a mobile telephone that was different from other mobile telephones because of the fact that it is more fun together with its superior battery and memory function. Say, the Apple mobile telephone could be used longer without recharge and has space for sending pictures. In that case, the central distinctive subconcepts of the Apple telephone would be 'fun', 'superior battery' and 'superior memory'.

Unlike in case of the similarity link, not all core concepts are shared at the level of the central distinctive subconcepts. In figure 4.13 above, only one core concept is shared by the central distinctive subconcepts ('fun'). The core concept 'user friendliness' is represented as a central distinctive subconcepts at the level of the article concept. Although it is not similar to the central distinctive subconcepts, it is not contradictory to the central distinctive subconcept either. Both are related. The superior battery and memory function enable 'user friendly' applications, like having very clear icons on the mobile telephone. Thus, these two concepts are a specification of the core concept 'user friendly'.

4.4.2.4 The contradiction link

The contradiction link means that the relationship between (some of) the core concepts and (some of) the central distinctive subconcepts is not based on equivalence, but on contradiction:

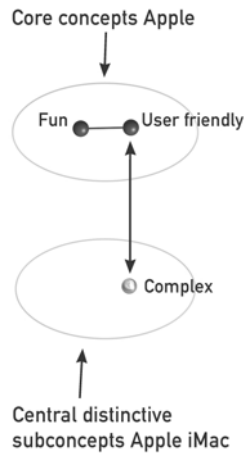


Figure 4.14 The contradiction link

Imagine that Apple would introduce technically very sophisticated computers that would be very complex to operate. Then, it is clear that one core concept at least – user friendliness – would contradict with this concept. Although it may not be logical that a brander allows concepts at the level of the articles that contradict with the core concepts, we will see that this can be the case after all.

In this section, we have discussed four different ways in which the core concepts can relate to the central distinctive subconcepts of the article concepts. These reflect different degrees in which the core concepts contribute to the conceptual structure of the article concepts.

In the next section, we will discuss the relationship between the core concepts and article concepts as a whole.

4.4.3 The relationship between core concepts and article concepts

4.4.3.1 Introduction

The relationship between core concepts and article concepts can also be analysed to gain insight in the way in which the core concepts provide a frame of reference for the products corresponding with the article concepts. This relationship will be characterized by different types of ICM. Figure 4.15 displays this relationship:

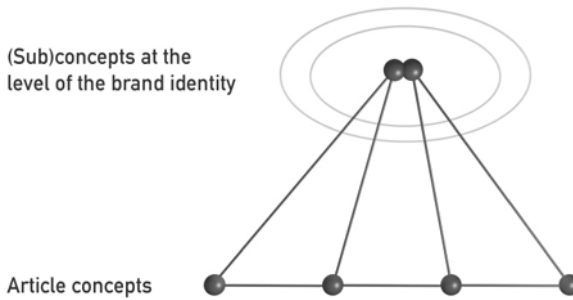


Figure 4.15 Relationship between (sub)concepts of the brand identity and the article concepts

Whereas a link describes the relationship between the identity concept and the article concept in terms of the degree to which they have subconcepts in common, the ICM describes this relationship in terms of the 'principle' by which the identity concept is connected to the article concept. In chapter 3, we have called this 'principle' the frame of reference that is provided by the core concept.

We have argued that an ICM can function as a frame of reference for certain categories. The category of 'waiters' for instance, is understood relative to a restaurant ICM. The restaurant ICM is a network of concepts, consisting of subconcepts like, cook, owner, visitor, etc.. By considering the concept waiter relative to a restaurant ICM, the membership of the category of waiters is defined in a particular way. The waiter is a category of persons who work in a restaurant. The restaurant ICM provides a frame of reference for the category of waiters.

The restaurant ICM is a network of concepts that can function as a frame of reference. The core concepts are also a network of concepts – an ICM – that can provide a frame of reference for certain categories of products. The category 'Macintosh microcomputers' is defined relative to a particular ICM, provided by the core concepts of the brand identity. This ICM is a network of related concepts, like 'liberation', 'friendly', 'intelligent', 'creative', 'cool' (Kapferer, 1992: 51). The category of Apple microcomputers is defined relative to this ICM.

To understand the way in which the core concepts of the brand identity fulfil their role as a frame of reference for the article concepts and hence, for a category products, we have to analyse the relationship between these core concepts as a whole and the article concepts corresponding with a particular category of products. This relationship – more speci-

fically, the frame of reference that is provided by the core concepts – can be characterized by a specific type of ICM. By characterising the relationship between the restaurant and the waiter in terms of a scenario, it is explained that the category of waiters is a group of persons whose membership of the category is defined by their place in that scenario, i.e. persons who welcome visitors, serve dinner, provide assistance in payment, etc.. Consequently, the role of the core concepts as a frame of reference for products is analysed by characterising the relationship between these core concepts as a whole and the article concepts corresponding to a particular category of products in terms of a type of ICM.

In this paragraph, we will address this relationship. From a theoretical point of view, there are basically three ways in which the core concepts can fulfil this role as a frame of reference. These are based on three types of ICM's.

In section 4.4.3.2., the core concepts are discussed as providing a frame of reference in the form of a higher order category of which the category of products is a subcategory. Section 4.4.3.3. describes the core concepts as providing a 'highlighted' product feature that is shared by the category of products. In section 4.4.3.4., finally, the core concepts are considered as a metaphorical frame of reference which gives rise to symbolic features.

4.4.3.2 The core concepts as a taxonomic frame of reference

The first form in which the core concepts can be related to the article concepts is a taxonomic ICM. As described in paragraph 3.6.4, the taxonomic ICM can be characterized as follows:

a. It consists of concepts that are related to categories of entities. These entities are defined by feature bundles. The taxonomic ICM consists of features that describe a 'kind of entity'. It consists of those features that are characteristic to that kind. It consists of concepts that relate to higher level categories and concepts that relate to lower level categories. The lower level categories 'are part of' the higher level categories.

b. The concepts that are related to lower level categories share the features of the concepts that are related to higher level categories as far as these are characteristic to that category.

Let's consider an example in which the relationship between the core concept and the article concepts is defined by a taxonomic ICM. In that case, the core concepts are related to concepts that correspond to a category

ry of entities, a category of products. The core concept is a bundle of features corresponding to a higher level category of products. These features define 'a kind of product'. The article concepts are also a bundle of features corresponding with a category of products, only a lower level category of products.

For example, the brand Mars could be represented as such:

Higher level category	Products with chocolate colour, taste, form, smell (defined by core concepts)
Middle level category	Candy bar, chocolate tablet products with chocolate colour, taste, form, smell (defined by article concept)
Lower level category	Mini candy bar, chocolate king size tablet with chocolate colour, taste, form, smell (defined by other article concept)

In the example above, the relationship between the core concepts and article concepts is defined by a taxonomic ICM. The core concepts as a bundle of features represent a bundle of general features encompassing the features of all article concepts. The article concepts are particularizations of the core concepts.

A category of products (say, Mars candy bar) which is defined relative to a taxonomic frame of reference is a subcategory of the category of products corresponding to the core concepts. The core concepts identify an overall product category (chocolate products) of which the particular category of products (candy bar) is part.

4.4.3.3 The core concepts as a feature frame of reference

If the relationship between core concepts and article concepts is defined by a feature ICM, the core concepts provide one feature or a combination of features which is shared by all article concepts. The core concepts do not correspond with a bundle of features encompassing all the features of the article concepts. They only represent one or a small collection of highlighted features which is/are shared by the article concepts. These features are concepts of the identity concepts that are put forward to play a dominant role in the relationship with the article concepts.

Consider, for instance, the brand Volvo. This brand is defined around at least one specific concept, 'safety' (Aaker, 1996: 97). If 'safety' is under-

stood as a core concept of Volvo, its relationship with the article concepts can be understood in terms of the feature bundle. Within the conceptual structure of the brand Volvo, the feature 'safety' is highlighted. It plays a more important role in defining the category of cars corresponding with the article concepts. Thus, the relationship between the core concepts and the article concepts is characterized by a graded feature bundle: not all concepts within the conceptual structure of the brand identity play an equal role in defining the category of products corresponding with the article concepts. Some features play a more dominant role in defining that category, than others. In case of Volvo, the category of Volvo cars is defined relative to an ICM which considers safety as an important feature. This is depicted in figure 4.16.

In paragraph 4.2.3.1., we have made a distinction between product features (including both product properties and functional properties) and symbolic features. If the relationship between the core concepts and the article concepts is defined by a feature ICM, the core concepts represent product features alone. One or two core concepts play a more dominant role in defining the category of products than other core concepts do. They represent product features, for instance 'safe' in the case of Volvo:

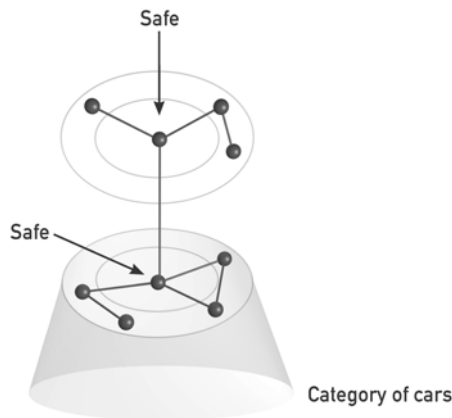


Figure 4.16 The core concepts providing a feature frame of reference

If the core concepts represent symbolic features, they provide a metaphorical frame of reference.

4.4.3.4 The core concepts as metaphorical frame of reference

In paragraph 3.6.5., we discussed the metaphoric model as a possible ICM. In the case of the metaphoric ICM, a concept that belongs to a particular domain is related to a concept that exists in another domain.

As we illustrated by using the metaphor 'argument is war', a metaphor works by mapping aspects of a source concept ('WAR') onto a target concept ('ARGUMENT'). The concept ARGUMENT is metaphorically structured, which means that some aspects of the concept ARGUMENT are understood in terms of another concept (WAR). Both concepts belong to a different domain. The concept WAR is considered a source concept, which belongs to the domain of armed conflict, whereas the concept ARGUMENT is the target concept belonging to the domain of verbal discourse. Aspects of the more directly understood source concept are projected onto the target concept. As a result, aspects of arguing are understood in terms of war. By such metaphoric projection, some aspects of the target concept are highlighted and others are hidden.

If the core concepts are related to the article concepts by a metaphoric ICM, the core concepts draw their meaning from a domain that is different from the product domain – the domain of the article concepts. To illustrate this, we return to our example of the brand Zwitsal. As depicted in figure 4.4., the so called central values are 'love' and 'security'. The relationship between the particular core concepts of Zwitsal – 'love' and 'security' – and a possible article concept – the one corresponding with the category 'soap' – is metaphorical. The core concepts of Zwitsal, 'love' and 'security' are abstract concepts that represent a source domain for the target domain of products, represented by the article concepts of Zwitsal, i.e. soap. Aspects of the product soap (the target concept), for example no irritants, mild, safe in use (the product and functional features), are understood in terms of the source domain 'love' and 'security'. Metaphor is created by the relationship between the core concepts – which belong to a specific domain – and the article concept – belonging to another domain –. By metaphoric projection, aspects of the target concept 'soap' are understood in terms of a different domain to which the core concepts are related. As such, particular aspects of the product soap are highlighted. In particular, the securing and tender aspects of soap and the use of soap. Other aspects of the concept are hidden, such as for instance the fact that it can sting in your eyes. The correlation between the source domain represented by the abstract concepts 'love' and 'security' and the target concept

'soap' is based on the fact that soap can be tender and secure to your skin. The symbolic features, represented by the features 'careful' and 'responsible' are related to the source domain, represented by the concepts 'love' and 'security'. They are not related to the domain of product, i.e. soap.

When the core concepts provide a metaphorical frame of reference, they are abstract concepts like 'love of security' and/or concepts representing symbolic features related to these concepts (like 'careful' or 'responsible'). In short, they are concepts related to another domain than the domain of the article concepts. By relation of these concepts with the article concepts, the category of products corresponding with the article concepts are understood in terms of these abstract concepts. This is depicted in figure 4.17.

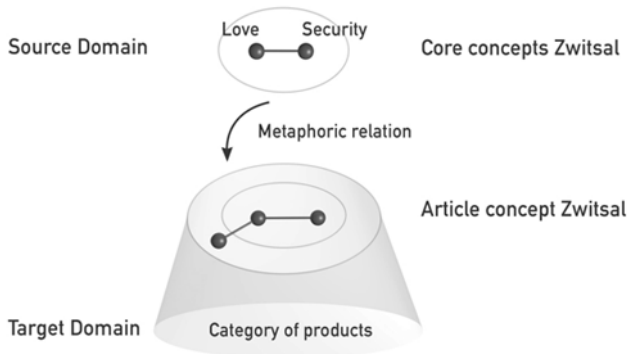


Figure 4.17 The brand concept Zwitsal as metaphorical frame of reference

In this section, we have discussed the way in which the core concepts provide a frame of reference for the category of products, by analysing its relationship with the article concepts. The core concepts (together with its related concepts at the level of the brand identity) can represent three possible frames of reference:

- 1 The core concepts as taxonomic frame of reference.

In this case, the core concepts correspond with a higher order category of products, while the article concept corresponds with a subcategory of that category. The article concepts correspond with subcategories of an encompassing category of products. The core concepts are related to that encompassing category. They represent all the features shared by the categories corresponding with the article concepts that are characteristic to the particular 'kind of product'.

2 The core concepts as feature frame of reference.

The core concepts represent (a few) product features that are highlighted from the conceptual structure of the brand identity. These features are shared by the products that correspond with the article concepts. These product features are properties of the product or functional features.

3 The core concepts as a metaphorical frame of reference.

In this case, the core concepts represent a source domain for the category of products, corresponding with the article concepts. The core concepts are abstract concepts, concepts which are related to another domain than the domain of products. These concepts are related to symbolic features. In case the core concepts provide a metaphorical frame of reference, a metaphor is created by the fact that the core concepts and the article concepts are related to different domains and yet related to each other. By metaphoric projection the category of products, corresponding with the article concepts, are understood in terms of the core concepts. By doing so, the core concepts do not just add features to these products (like in case of the feature ICM), they highlight certain aspects of these products.

In the next chapter, we will relate these three kinds of frames of references to our research objective, the variety/specificity dilemma.

4.5 Conclusion

It is the insight in the grouping ability of a brand that is crucial to understand the way in which a brander deals with the variety-specificity dilemma. To provide such an insight, we have discussed a conceptual approach to branding in this chapter. We began with discussing the categorization perspective on branding. Such a perspective, however, does not provide a sufficient insight in the principles underlying the groupings established by brands. The integration of categorization theory with a conceptual approach to branding does provide a deeper insight into these principles.

In this chapter, we have elaborated a framework which can be used to analyse the conceptual structure of the brand. By this framework, the conceptual structure of the brand is perceived as consisting of different

kinds of concepts: a brand identity concept and the brand article concept. The brand identity concept is the unity of concepts that provide boundaries for variety. The brand identity concept is an ICM. It is an emergent whole that provides a frame of reference for the article concepts. The article concepts embody variety. Both these concepts have an internal structure. The brand identity concept consists of core concepts and peripheral concepts and the article concepts of central distinctive subconcepts and peripheral subconcepts.

We are treating the brand identity concept and the article concept as emergent wholes. However, to capture the meaning of that whole and to understand its capacity to express a consistent meaning, we are dividing that whole into parts and studying the relationship between those parts. Moreover, since one of our research questions is focused on investigating the brand concept with regard to the degree that it can absorb variety and preserve specificity, it is relevant to study the relationship between the concepts providing boundaries for variety (the brand identity concept) and the concepts representing variety (the article concepts). So, besides the internal structure of the identity concept and the article concepts, we have discussed different ways to analyse the possible relationships between them. As we can already assume from a theoretical perspective, these relationships can expose the principles behind and express certain tensions within the conceptual structure of the brand.

In paragraph 4.4.2. we have analysed the relationship between the core concepts and the central distinctive subconcepts of the article concepts. As we discussed, there are different degrees to which the core concepts can contribute to the article concepts. We identified four types of relationship to characterize these degrees, the so called *links*. In section 4.4.3. we have argued that the core concepts can provide a frame of reference for the category of products corresponding to the article concepts. The kind of frame of reference it provides depends on the specific relationship between the core concepts and the article concepts as characterized by a specific *type of ICM*. We have generated three possible ways in which the core concepts can provide a frame of reference for products.

In the next chapter, we will use these insights to construct a method for the investigation of the brander's concept of the brand.

CHAPTER 5

Diagnosing the stabilization of the brander system

5.1 Introduction

At the end of chapter 2, we concluded that the stabilization and destabilization of the brander system would be our main object of empirical investigation. The problem of (de)stabilizing the brander system becomes relevant for the brand regulator especially when he is confronted with a pressure to increase variety. In this case, it is stimulated to link even more products, services or concepts to the brand. The problem then concentrates on the use of the brand identity as a tool in the regulation of the brander's operations. The brand identity defines 'boundaries' of the brander's operations. Under the influence of a variety pressure, it is tempting for the brand regulator to widen the boundaries set by the brand identity. This, however, can create a tension with the need for the brand identity – and in the end the brand – to stay specific.

In this chapter, we will describe a method to investigate this variety – specificity dilemma. More in particular, we will investigate the consequences of variety pressure on the abilities of the brand regulator to keep the brander's operations in line with the brand identity (see figure 2.13). We will do so by relating the insights from the previous two chapters to the research questions of chapter 2. In chapter 2 we concluded that the ability of the brand regulator to deal with the dilemma of variety and specificity, mainly depends on two things: the characteristics of the brand identity itself and the regulating abilities of the brand regulator.

In chapter 3 and 4, we examined the characteristics of brand identity. We concluded that the normative brand concept can be investigated by analysing its conceptual structure and we created a framework that could help to do that job. In this chapter, we will *firstly* discuss how this framework can be used to reveal differences of brand identities in 'dealing with the variety – specificity dilemma'. We will show how this framework can be applied to display these differences both in terms of the variety that

can be absorbed by a brand identity and the risk that it can lose specificity.

Based on these insights we will *secondly* discuss how the analysis of the regulating actions of the brander can contribute to gaining more insight in the way the brand regulator deals with the variety-specificity dilemma. In chapter 2, we have described regulation from a cybernetic perspective. In the previous two chapters we have examined a way to analyse the conceptual tensions that can be a result of an increase of variety. In this chapter, we will discuss how the cybernetic description of the regulating actions of chapter 2 can be used to analyse the impact of these regulating actions on causing and/or preventing the conceptual inconsistencies of the brand identity that might be caused by dealing with the variety-specificity dilemma.

In sections 5.2. and 5.3., we will discuss the way in which the framework of the previous chapter(s) can be used to reveal differences between brand identities regarding the variety-specificity dilemma. In section 5.2., it will be made clear how to investigate these differences with respect to the degree to which a brand identity can absorb variety. Section 5.3. deals with the analysis of the differences between brand identities with respect to the risk of losing specificity. Section 5.4. deals with the contribution of an analysis of the actions of the brand regulator to an understanding of the differences in dealing with the danger of specificity loss.

The results of this chapter are some analytical instruments that can be used in chapter 6 to investigate the variety-specificity dilemma in three cases.

5.2 Investigating differences in the categorizing ability of core concepts

5.2.1 Sources that drive variety

In this section we will look for a method to analyse the differences in the ability of a brand identity to categorize a variety of different (kinds of) products and customers⁷⁸. In the previous chapters, we argued that concepts provide categorization rules. They determine the boundaries for the actual entities that can be grouped together by a category. These theoretical insights in concepts and categorization are helpful to investigate the variety – specificity dilemma. Based on these insights, we argue that – in general – differences with respect to the *variety* of entities that can be

grouped together in a category, can be investigated by revealing the categorization rules provided by a concept this category is related to. With respect to our research questions, this means that the variety of products that can be absorbed by a brand identity will be investigated by assessing the categorization rules provided by the most important concepts of the brand identity; i.e. the core concepts. Differences with respect to the categorization rules provided by these core concepts can be investigated by analysing two factors: a) the content of the core concepts themselves and b) the frame of reference provided by the core concepts.

The content of the core concepts themselves

Some concepts offer more space to categorize a variety of products or customers than others: a concept like 'chocolate products' offers the opportunity to categorize a greater variety of products than the concept 'candy bar' does. The concept 'consumer goods' allows a greater variety of products compared to the concept 'chocolate products'.

As we described in the previous chapters, one aspect of the categorization rules provided by a concept is the source of equivalence, which refers to the principle by which a concept 'treats things the same'. The concept 'chocolate products' provides the following source of equivalence: that is product properties. By these properties, the concept is *open* to particular kinds of products we refer to as chocolate products. Quite a lot of – in fact most – products are not part of the category corresponding to that concept. The concept is *closed* to these other products.

Differences in the degree of the variety allowed by a concept can at least partly be traced back to differences in the content of the concepts. In investigating the degree of variety in the next chapter, we will investigate differences with respect to the content of the core concepts first.

The frame of reference provided by the core concepts

Depending on the type of frame of reference provided by the core concepts, a brand identity concept is more or less open to a variety of products and customers. The type of frame of reference provided by the core concepts can also provide insight in the difference between concepts in categorizing a variety of products and/or customers. In the next sections (5.2.2., 5.2.3., 5.2.4. and 5.2.5.), the differences between core concepts in their ability to categorize a variety of products, are investigated by revealing the differences in variety that follow from the use of different types of frames of reference. The distinguished differences, then, will be tested in the next chapter.

A 'type of frame of reference' can, as we discussed in section 4.4., be analysed by characterising the relationship between core concepts as a whole and article concepts. This is depicted in figure 5.1. By analysing this relationship, an insight is gained into how these core concepts provide a frame of reference for the category of products corresponding to the article concepts.

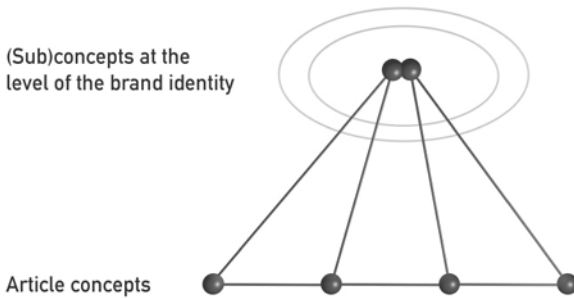


Figure 5.1 The frame of reference provided by the core concepts

This relationship is analysed in terms of different types of Idealized Cognitive Models (ICMs). In the previous chapter, we identified three types of frames of reference, based on three different types of ICMs:

- 1 The core concepts as a *taxonomic frame of reference*.
- 2 The core concepts as a *feature frame of reference*.
- 3 The core concepts as a *metaphorical frame of reference*.

In the next four paragraphs, we will discuss the consequences of these frames with respect to the variety of products and customers allowed by them.

5.2.2 Variety allowed by the taxonomic frame of reference

If the core concepts provide a taxonomic frame of reference, the relationship between the core concepts and the category of products corresponding with the article concepts is hierarchical. For instance, a possible core concept like 'chocolate products' is related hierarchically to article concepts like 'candy bar', or 'chocolate toffees'. The core concept corresponds with a general category of products (a higher order category) encompassing all subcategories of products (lower level categories) corresponding with the article concepts. The article concepts in this case share all the

features of the core concepts defining 'a kind of product' as such.

So, the variety of products that is allowed by the core concepts as a taxonomic frame of reference is first of all limited to products that share all the features of the core concepts defining a 'kind of product as such'. Secondly, these features are product properties; features directly related to the product. The variety of products that is allowed by a taxonomic frame of reference is limited to those sharing all product properties defined by the core concepts. Stated differently, the core concepts define a category of products that is open to various subcategories of products. These subcategories of products share all the product properties of the core concepts.

As illustrated by the 'chocolate products' example, the products that are members of this category of 'chocolate products' all differ with respect to particular other product features. Although the categories 'candy bar' and 'chocolate egg' share all the features of the core concept a kind of product as such (chocolate products), they have particular product features of their own, that define a subcategory. The higher order category is 'open' to various subcategories; new products are allowed as long as these are subcategories of the higher order category 'chocolate products' as defined by the core concept.

The core concept as a taxonomic frame of reference suggests that customers are categorized by the fact that they *buy* a particular *category of products that have particular product properties*. The variety of customers that is allowed by a taxonomic frame of reference is limited to those customers that prefer this kind of products. Customers are understood relative to a product focus: the principle, by which customers are treated equally, is the fact that they prefer 'a particular kind of product'. Because a taxonomic frame of reference provides openness for different subcategories of a category of products, the variety of customers that can be categorized is also determined by the fact that they prefer the specific features of these subcategories on top of the more general product properties defined by the core concepts: those preferring a candy bar, a chocolate egg, etc.. This is the basis for traditional customer segmentation used in marketing⁷⁹: creating different groups of customers or customer preferences by ascribing preference for product variants (or features) to them.

5.2.3 *Variety allowed by the feature frame of reference*

Core concepts that function as a feature frame of reference concern a (set of) feature(s) that are highlighted within the conceptual structure of the brand identity and which are shared by the article concepts. In contrast with the taxonomic frame of reference, the article concepts related to the core concepts that function as a feature frame of reference do not share all the features of these core concepts which define 'a kind of product' in itself. The source of equivalence provided by the feature frame of reference is a (set of) highlighted feature(s), shared by one or more products. Unlike the taxonomic frame of reference, the feature frame of reference does not only concern product properties, but also functional features, i.e. a functional consequence of a product property. They are related to a category which provides 'closure' based on a (set of) feature(s) of a product; i.e. product properties or functional features. They are 'open' to different categories of products that fit a (set of) feature(s): new kinds of products can be categorized on the basis of the core concept as long as these articles share such a (set of) feature(s). Consider the example of Volvo. One of the core concepts of this brand is 'safe'. This core concept provides a feature frame of reference for the products of Volvo: all the products of Volvo have to be safe. The core concepts are not a set of product properties defining 'a kind of product', but a functional feature adding a specific feature to products.

In general, the core concepts providing a feature frame of reference have the ability to categorize a greater variety of products than core concepts that function as taxonomic frame of reference. In the first case, new categories of products only have to share a (set of) highlighted feature(s). In the second case, new categories of products have to share all the properties of the core concept defining a particular 'kind of product'. Core concepts that function as a feature frame of reference in principle allow more variety than the ones providing a taxonomic frame of reference because the former can also provide functional features to products, while the latter can only provide product properties. Product properties are directly related to a certain product. The taxonomic ICM defines a kind of product in itself. It concerns a definition of a product as such, for instance 'chocolate products'. The variety of products that is allowed by such product property is limited to sweet food products. However, functional features indicate the consequences of these properties, a qualification that exceeds the physical aspects of products. For instance: the feature

'safe'. Core concepts providing a feature frame of reference do not 'simply' define a 'kind of product'; they represent a functional feature that can be added to products not sharing the same product properties. One can imagine a larger variety of products sharing that 'functional' feature, as, for instance, bicycles, airplanes or even clothing.

A core concept providing a feature frame of reference categorizes *customers* on the basis of one or a few product feature(s). In the case of our Volvo example: presuming that it provides a feature frame of reference based on 'safety', the brand identity concept categorizes customers that are attracted to safety. The variety of customers that can be categorized by core concepts functioning as a feature frame of reference is based on the fact that they share a use of or preference for one or a few particular product feature(s) (product properties and functional features). Compared to the taxonomic frame of reference – which provides an indication of a 'kind of product' – the core concepts as feature frame of reference specify ways a customer should 'think' about a particular product: when it comes to cars, Volvo drivers prefer safety.

5.2.4 *Variety allowed by the metaphorical frame of reference*

Core concepts that function as a metaphorical frame of reference belong to some other domain than the domain of products. In case of Zwitsal, the categories of products (soap, shampoo, bath foam, cream, sun lotion) can be considered as a target domain which is understood in terms of the source domain 'love and security'. The concepts of the source domain are projected onto the product target domain, i.e. the domain of products related to the article concepts. As a result, the concept love is related to the aspect 'mild'. The concept 'security' is related to the product feature 'safe'. The consequence of such relationships is a metaphor: the products become symbols of something else, i.e. love and security.

The variety of products that can be categorized by core concepts functioning as a metaphorical frame of reference is even less limited than the variety allowed by core concepts that work as a feature frame of reference.

Unlike the core concepts functioning as a taxonomic frame of reference, the core concepts providing a metaphorical frame of reference are open to products that do not need to share product properties. In the case of the metaphorical frame of reference, the core concepts allow all products to be categorized as long as they share (a set of) symbolic features

embodied by the core concepts. These symbolic features also distinguish the metaphoric frame of reference from the feature frame of reference. The functional features of the feature frame of reference are related more closely to a specific product than the symbolic features of the metaphorical frame of reference. The symbolic features are related to a different domain than the domain of products. Because the concepts 'love and security' are as such not related to a specific kind of product or specific functional features, the potential variety of products that can be categorized by these concepts is greater than in the case of the taxonomic or feature frame of reference.

However, linking new products to core concepts of a metaphorical frame of reference is not just a matter of relating these products to symbolic features arbitrarily. The actual variety of products that can be categorized by a metaphorical frame of reference depends on the ability to find some sort of 'correspondence' or correlation between product aspects and these symbolic features. As described in the previous chapter, the 'correspondence' between the concepts 'love and security' and the various categories of products is based on the soft, safe and protecting aspects of the Zwitsal products. Based on such a 'correspondence', the core concept (in principle) is able to categorize every product that shares these aspects and can therefore be metaphorically related to these core concepts. The core concepts are open to all products as long as some 'correspondences' can be created between these concepts and the aspects of the new products⁸⁰.

When it comes to categorizing customers, the core concepts providing a metaphorical frame of reference not only categorize customers on the basis of product features alone, but also on the basis of symbolic features. In case of Zwitsal, these symbolic features are 'responsible' and 'careful', corresponding with 'love and security'. Even more than in the case of a feature frame of reference, core concepts functioning as a metaphorical frame of reference categorize customers on qualities that exceed product characteristics. Customers are categorized referring to a specific attitude towards the symbolic use of these products.

5.2.5 Conclusion: differences in the categorizing abilities

In this section, we have argued that the differences in variety provided by the core concepts of a brand can be investigated by analysing the content of these concepts and the frame of reference they provide for article con-

cepts. With respect to the first, one could say that the content of the core concepts must be considered and compared to the content of other core concepts. With respect to the latter, different frames of reference have different consequences for the ‘closure’ they cause in categorizing products and customers.

In the table below, the consequences of these frames for variety are illustrated:

Frame of reference	Categorization Rule	Product categorization	Customer categorization
Taxonomic	Closure based on: A kind of product, sharing all product properties belonging to the product as such	Limited variety: different products of the same kind that share all product properties	Different categories of customers categorized on the basis of their preference for certain product properties
Feature	Closure based on: One or more product feature(s) highlighted in the conceptual structure of the brand identity	More variety: different (categories) of products sharing one or more product feature(s), which can be product properties or functional features	[Category] of customers categorized on the basis of one or more product feature(s), which can be properties or functional features.
Metaphor	Closure based on: Concepts from an unrelated source domain	Most variety: different categories of products which have aspects that are linked to the core concepts from an unrelated domain by metaphoric correspondence	[Categories] of customers categorized on the basis of a general (set of) symbolic feature(s) which are linked to the core concepts from the unrelated domain.

Figure 5.2 Conceptual consequences of the frame of reference provided by the core concepts

As this figure illustrates, different frames of reference provide different rules for categorization. Based on these rules, different abilities for categorization occur. Core concepts that provide respectively a taxonomic, feature and a metaphorical frame of reference increasingly allow a greater variety of products.

In the case studies of chapter 6, we will investigate ‘the variety absorbing potential’ of brands by analysing the nature of the core concepts and ‘the type of frame of reference’ provided by them. Both provide an indication about the way in which core concepts allow a variety of prod-

ucts or customers or limit that variety. By analysing the cases in the next chapter, we will investigate whether the notion of 'the content of the concept' and the 'frame of reference' indeed explain differences between core concepts in categorizing a variety of products and customers.

In the next section, we will discuss the other aspect of the variety-specificity dilemma: the danger of losing specificity. Again, we will use the insights of the previous chapter to produce a method to investigate this danger.

5.3 Investigating the risk of losing specificity.

In this section we will present a framework to investigate the risk of a brand identity to lose specificity as a result of obeying to the need to absorb variety. We will show that a conceptual analysis can be used to assess this risk. Like in the previous section, the increase in 'absorbed variety' means here 'an increase in articles that are or can be attached to the brand'.

The method we present to investigate the danger of losing specificity is based on a conceptual interpretation of brands. A conceptual analysis of the brand identity can reveal the risk of a brand identity losing specificity as a result of increasing the variety of articles that is related to the brand. It will focus on the role of the core concepts in giving specificity to the brand and is based on the idea that conceptual inconsistencies are an obstruction to fulfil that role effectively. Thus, conceptual inconsistencies increase the risk that the brand identity becomes less specific under influence of more 'variety absorption'.

Some extension researchers have proven that inconsistencies between the products and the brand lead to dilution of the brand. Research by Loken & Roedder (1993) reflects an attempt to specify effects of brand extensions on beliefs about the 'family brand name': "Specifically, we investigate whether brand extension failures can cause 'dilution' of specific attribute beliefs that consumers have come to hold about an established brand name (1993: 72)." They investigate how specific beliefs about the family name were changed by new information conveyed by a brand extension inconsistent with the brand beliefs. They conclude that dilution effects do occur as a result of inconsistencies between the brand extension and beliefs associated with the family brand name: "These findings contribute to the growing literature on brand extensions by providing

the first indication that unsuccessful brand extensions *can* dilute brand names by diminishing the favourable attribute beliefs consumers have learned to associate with the family brand name (1993: 79)." Such dilution effects must be observed and explained by applying our methods.

Loken & Roedder investigate the relationship between the family brand name, or brand beliefs, and the effects of products that are related to that brand name. In terms of our framework: they describe the relationship between the article concepts – representing the products – and the core concepts – representing the most important brand beliefs. Their research shows that inconsistencies between the family brand name and the products might endanger the specificity of the brand. In terms of our method: conceptual inconsistencies between the core concepts and the article concepts weaken the capacity of the core concepts to produce a specific meaning of the brand and, thus, endanger the specificity of the brand (identity).

Research by Dacin & Smith (1993) has proved that such a conceptual consistency influences the evaluation of extensions by consumers. These authors found that the amount of extensions in itself does not influence a positive or negative judgement of these extensions, but that the mutual correspondence between these articles does. Where there was a cognitive inconsistency between the articles, the new products added to the brand name were judged negatively. Again, from a brander's perspective, such a consistency can be provided by the core concepts of a brand (identity).

From a reverse perspective, Broniarzcyk & Alba (1994) have argued that if a new product (in our case, an article concept) is contributing positively to the parent brand (in our case: its core concepts), the specificity of the latter is not diluted. As they argue: "Brand extensions also can reinforce the specific associations of the brand. An extension into a category that shares the same benefit may strengthen that association with the brand name and thereby increase the brand's value in its original product category. Thus, proper extension may nullify the much-feared 'dilution effect' (Broniarzcyk & Alba, 1994: 228)." In our terms: the more the core concepts are shared by the (new) brand articles attached to it, the less danger there is they lose specificity.

The cited studies focus on the effect of adding products to brands by investigating the customers' perceptions and evaluations. We will study the risk of specificity loss by focusing on the conceptual structure of the brand as it is constructed by the brander. To investigate the danger of the brand identity to lose specificity, we must investigate two possible kinds of conceptual inconsistencies.

The first kind refers to possible inconsistencies between the core concepts. If the core concepts themselves are inconsistent, it will be hard to provide a consistent frame of reference for the article concepts.

The second kind refers to the conceptual inconsistencies between the core concepts and the article concepts. We presuppose that the more the core concepts play a positive role in defining the article concepts, the less inconsistencies there are between the core concepts and the concepts of the article concepts and therefore the more the specificity of the brand (identity) is preserved.

In section 4.4.3, we have described the way in which the core concepts and the distinctive subconcepts of the article concepts can be analysed. The danger that the brand (identity) will lose specificity under the influence of adding new products to the brand, can be investigated by analysing the (in) consistency of the relationship between the core concepts and the central distinctive subconcepts at the level of the article concepts- :

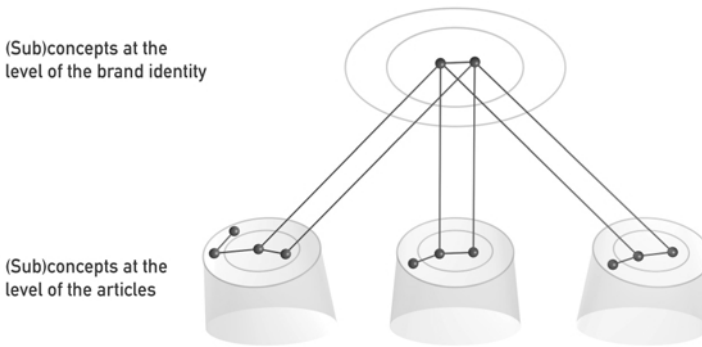


Figure 5.3 Assessing the risk for specificity dilution: the relationship between core concepts and central distinctive subconcepts of the article concepts.

We identified four different kinds of possible links between the core concepts and the distinctive subconcepts of the article concepts. These different links refer to different degrees of possible (in)consistencies between them:

1 The instance link.

In case of the instance link, all the distinctive subconcepts of the article concept are the same as the core concepts. In that case, there are no conceptual inconsistencies between the article concept and the core concept. The addition of new articles to the core concepts is not at the expense of the specificity of the brand identity: because the specificity of the core concepts is transferred directly to the article concepts. So, if the core concepts are related to the article concepts by an instance link, the specificity of the brand identity is preserved.

2 The similarity link.

In case of the similarity link, there are also no inconsistencies between the core concepts and the central distinctive subconcepts of the articles. As with the instance link, all the core concepts are present at the level of the central distinctive subconcepts. However, next to these, the article has distinctive subconcepts of its own. The specificity of the brand identity is preserved because the core concepts are represented by some of the central distinctive subconcepts of the article concepts and the article concepts have central distinctive subconcepts 'of their own', supporting the specificity of the core concepts. Again, the specificity of the core concepts is not diluted.

3 The transformational link.

In this case, there are inconsistencies between the core concepts and the article concepts, in such a way that at least one of the core concepts does not appear at the level of the central distinctive subconcepts. This core concept is not contradictory to the central distinctive subconcepts, but related to it. The specificity of the brand (identity) is potentially weakened because at least one of the core concepts is not present at the level of the article concepts. In this case, adding new article concepts to the brand identity means that the core concepts are not all 'reproduced' via the article concepts. The distinctness of the article concepts is not fully determined by the core concepts, but also by the article concepts themselves, via different central distinctive subconcepts. The risk of such a relationship is that if the specificity of the brand is communicated via the (most important subconcepts of the⁸¹) article concepts, the specificity of the brand (identity) decreases. In the case of the instance and similarity link, the communication of the brand via article concepts supports the specificity of the brand identity because the core concepts are included at

the level of the articles. Since this is not (or partly) the case here, the specificity of the core concepts is only fully preserved if it is communicated separately (not via article concepts).

4 The contradiction link.

In this latter case, there exists an inconsistency between the core concepts and the article concepts. In this case, at least one of the core concepts and the distinctive subconcepts contradict. That means that the specificity of the brand (identity) is weakened because the central distinctive subconcepts contradict with (at least one of) the core concepts. In the previous types of links, the article concepts are more or less supported and at least not contradicted by the core concepts. In the case of the contradiction link, the 'distribution of specificity' by the core concepts is obstructed: the article concepts propose concepts that contradict with the specificity of the core concepts. So, the brand is a bunch of contradicting concepts, which is not convincing.

So, by analysing the relationship between the core concepts and the central distinctive subconcepts of the article concepts, we expect to gain insight in the risk that the specificity of the brand identity decreases under the influence of new articles that are attached to the brand. If the relationship between the core concepts and the distinctive subconcepts of the article concepts is characterized by a transformational and especially by the contradiction link, such risk is higher than if the development of the brand takes place by linking article concepts to the core concepts via an instance or a similarity link.

In the last two sections, we have now related the insights of the previous two chapters to the research questions of chapter 2. As a result, we have discussed a methodological language that indicates how to investigate the variety – specificity problem by analysing the conceptual structure of the brand concept (as it is used by the brander). It can be used to provide clarity regarding the capacity of some brand identity to absorb variety and concerning the risk of this brand identity to lose specificity as a result of this process.

These methods can help to investigate one aspect concerning the possible differences between branders in keeping their operations in line with the brand identity while increasing variety, namely by revealing the conceptual consequences of this process. In the next section, we will dis-

cuss a way to analyse the other aspect of this ability, the regulating actions of the brand regulator.

5.4 Investigating the regulating abilities of the brand regulator

The analysis of the conceptual structure of the brand concept as used by the brander is one way of investigating the differences between branders in dealing with the variety-specificity dilemma. Besides the conceptual structure of the brand, specific problems can arise concerning the process of regulating the brander system itself. At the same time, the two are related. The process of regulation (the actual regulating actions) can result in a certain conceptual structure of the brand concept. We expect that differences in the conceptual structure can be clarified by investigating the way the brander performs or has performed regulating actions and vice versa: regulating actions can be explained by possible (in)consistencies in the conceptual structure of the brand.

In chapter 2, we distinguished different kinds of regulating options, based on cybernetic theory. In this section we will use these options as an input for designing some analytical distinctions that will be used to investigate the regulating abilities of the brander. Based on these distinctions, we will be able to investigate which forms of regulations were employed and how these relate to the conceptual structure that was discovered.

As we also discussed in chapter 2 that the brand regulator, once confronted with dangers, has three regulating options. The dangers are operationalized here as an increase in variety of products. The essential variable we focus on is the demand to keep the operations of the brander in line with the brand identity. So, the regulating options we describe show how a brand regulator can react once he is confronted with a need to increase the variety of products of the brand and is forced to keep his operations in line with the brand identity. Translated for this particular situation, the three regulating options are:

- A An increase in variety of products is blocked by the brand regulator by performing regulating actions within the same mode of behaviour, given certain values of the essential variables. In this case, the need for product variety is already blocked in direct interaction with the direct

relevant environment, before the essential variables are threatened. This means that either the proposed products are in line with the brand identity or these products are rejected by the brand regulator before they threaten the essential variables.

- B The brand regulator performs chooses a new mode of behaviour and the essential variables are given. Such a new mode of behaviour means that the (communication of) products are adapted in a specific way by the brand regulator so that they do fit the essential variables. This can include a new means or concept of communication. In this case, the brand regulator can avoid the new products not being in line with the brand identity by adding additional concepts to these products or communicating these products in a specific way or by specific means, so that they are brought in line with the brand identity. These new modes of behaviour are triggered by using a step mechanism and a gating mechanism.
- C The brand regulator chooses to change the values of the essential variables and (evidently) a new mode of behaviour (rejecting, adapting of changing new products or concepts). In this case, the proposed new products are not in line with the brand identity and the brand regulator triggers a new mode of behaviour based on a different brand identity. In the terminology of our framework: the brand regulator decides to a) change the core concepts, b) change the relationship between the core concepts and shared generalized brand concept and/or c) change the values for acceptable reaction patterns

By analysing these possible regulating options a brand regulator can use, we will be able to put the characteristics of the conceptual structure of the brand identity in broader perspective. More in particular, we expect to clarify why some brands have a great danger of losing specificity, while others do not. The way the brand regulator performs regulating actions might influence this. In other words, the purpose of analysing the regulating actions is to clarify this danger to lose specificity. To analyse these regulating actions, we have to add two possible factors to the regulating actions described above.

The feedback loops show that there are different ways in which the essential variables can be used in the process of regulation. The essential variables can either be applied (A-B) or changed (C). Moreover, the feedback loops displayed above represent ideal options for the regulation of a brander system. We expect that not all branders will be regulating the op-

erations of the brander system in order to preserve the system. In other words, 'keeping the operations in line with a brand identity' can be an essential variable for the brander system theoretically, that does not mean all branders in practice will use the brand identity for regulating their operations. We also have to bear in mind that it is possible that the brand identity is not used as an essential variable for regulation at all. In practice, branders can dominantly use other criteria for regulation, such as financial or political criteria.

All in all, this means that besides using the essential variables or changing the essential variables, we have a third alternative for regulation, namely not using essential variables in the process of regulating at all (thereby not regulating a brander system). We expect that brand regulators whose conceptual structure is consistent, will have problems using it and will probably use the brand identity as a criterion for regulation, while the brand regulators whose conceptual structure is not consistent, will probably use the brand identity to a far lesser degree in the process of regulation.

Secondly, brand regulators might differ in when to react to variety. Some brand regulators will block a danger *before*, some *after* an actual product proposal is being made. Brand regulators may differ in their ability to regulate either *proactively* or *reactively*. In the first case, regulation takes place without the threat of a concrete danger. Regulating actions are performed even before a concrete proposal to introduce a new product that can be potentially dangerous to the preservation of the essential variables. In the second case, regulation takes place while the danger already has had some impact. Product proposals already have been made and are already accepted by the brander system.

We expect that a brand regulator which brand identity has a conceptual structure that is characterized by 'few conceptual problems'⁸² is inclined to employing proactive regulation. Brand regulators using a problematic conceptual structure probably have problems in dealing with the variety-specificity dilemma. The first brander is able to prevent the threat of crossing the essential variables proactively. For instance, he might make scenarios for alternative product proposals or include a clear list of do's and don'ts concerning the range of products that can and cannot be related to the brand. Proactive regulation increases the chance that an increase in variety pressure does not threaten the specificity of a brand identity, because 'threatening variety' can be blocked upfront and changes are directed – in principle – at strengthening the brand identity.

All in all, we can say that the brand regulator has three possible options for regulating his operations:

	Reactive	Proactive
Regulation unrelated to core concepts	Rejecting, adapting products by other criteria than core concepts after they have been attached to the brand	Rejecting, adapting products by other criteria than core concepts before they have been attached to the brand
Regulation related to core concepts	Rejecting, adapting products by using core concepts after they have been attached to the brand	Rejecting, adapting products by using core concepts before they have been attached to the brand
Regulation based on changing the core concepts	Adapting the core concepts after new products have been attached to the brand	Adapting the core concepts before new products have been attached to the brand

Figure 5.4 Regulating options for the brand regulator

These distinctions will be used to observe and investigate the regulating actions of the brand regulator. Insight in these regulating actions is useful because it helps to understand the risk of a brand to lose its specificity. We expect that differences in conceptual structures can be clarified by differences in these regulating actions, and in some cases we expect it will work also the other way around.

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have used the insights of the previous chapters to present a framework that can be applied in the investigation of the (de)stabilization of a brander system that is exposed to increased variety pressure. More specifically, this framework can be used to investigate the ability of the brand regulator to keep the brander’s operations in line with the brand identity, when it is confronted with new products that are linked to the brand. We expect that the insight in this ability can be gained by investigating a) the conceptual structure of the brand identity and b) the regulating abilities of the brand regulator.

This implies that our investigation can be divided into two parts. The first one deals with an instrument for analysing the conceptual structure of the brand identity. The second one refers to a tool for the analysis of

the regulating abilities of the brand regulator. That means that in the cases in the next chapter, we will pay attention to the following subjects.

- 1 We will analyse the concepts and therefore the categorizing abilities of some particular brands. We expect that the investigation of the nature of core concepts and the kind of frame of reference provided by them sheds a light on the abilities of the core concepts to absorb variety. We distinguished three types of frames:
 - Core concepts providing a taxonomic frame of reference for products
 - Core concepts providing a feature frame of reference for products
 - Core concepts providing a metaphorical frame of reference for products

From a conceptual point of view, the possible variety of products that can be absorbed by the core concepts increases as they provide respectively a taxonomic, feature or metaphorical frame of reference.

- 2 We will analyse the risk of the brand identity to weaken its ability to provide specificity to the brand. Based on literature on 'brand extensions', we assume that such an addition of new article concepts can threaten the specificity of the brand if there are inconsistencies within the conceptual structure used by the brander. We expect to gain insight in the risk of losing specificity by analysing two kinds of (in)consistencies:
 - a.) The (in)consistencies of the core concepts
 - b.) The conceptual (in)consistencies of the article concepts and the core concepts. These can be analysed by characterising the relationship between the core concepts and the central distinctive sub-concepts of the article concepts. We identified four types of links:
 - the instance link
 - the similarity link
 - the transformational link
 - the contradiction link

The ability of the brand identity to add specificity to the brand is even more threatened if when we move from respectively, an instance link through similarity and transformational links to a contradiction link.

- 3 We expect that differences in the conceptual structures – indicating different dangers of losing specificity – can be understood by investigating the regulating actions of the brand regulator.
- As we saw in this chapter, there are three ‘levels’ at which regulation can take place:
- regulation unrelated to the core concepts
 - regulation related to the core concepts
 - regulation while changing the core concepts

For each of these levels, there are two ‘types’ of regulation, proactive and reactive regulation.

Based on these distinctions, we will investigate how brand regulators perform regulating actions, given a certain conceptual structure. Moreover, we will analyse the problems that arise from regulating in a specific way. At least, we expect that brand regulators that apply a conceptual structure of the brand with conceptual tensions will be less inclined to use core concepts as essential variables and to perform reactive regulation, then brand regulators that do not have these problems.

In schema:

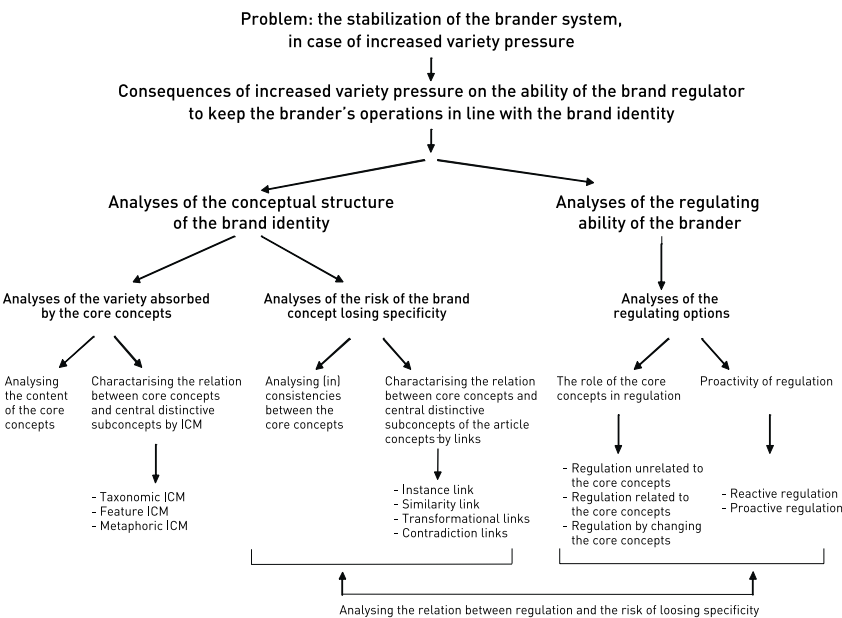


Figure 5.5 Framework for analysing the cases

In the next chapter, we will test this framework on three different cases.

CHAPTER 6

Case studies

6.1 Introduction

Our first research objective is to find explanations for the differences with respect to the abilities of branders to keep their operations in line with a brand identity. This is a challenge especially for those branders that are confronted with an increased variety pressure. The second research objective is to investigate whether insights into cybernetic and concept theory can be helpful in explaining this issue. In the previous chapters, we have developed a framework based on cybernetics and concept theory that can be used for describing and explaining differences. It concerns an analytical repertoire that can be used to uncover ways in which branders deal with the variety-specificity dilemma. In this chapter, we will see whether and how this framework can contribute to finding explanations concerning these differences.

Firstly, the empirical research discussed in this chapter is used to meet the first research objective: to find explanations for the differences between branders regarding the ability to regulate their operations in such way that they are in line with the brand identity.

Secondly, the empirical enquiry is used to meet the second research objective: to test the framework in various ways. We will use the case studies to test whether the framework can provide insight into the first research objective described above. Moreover, these serve to test the applicability of the framework. Therefore, we will also look at whether the theoretical notions brought forward can actually be applied. Finally, the cases give an indication of the value of the framework and methods for branders.

The empirical enquiry is conducted among three brands, all of which were confronted somehow with increased variety pressure. The branders that were investigated all had plans to introduce new products under the

brand name, had the intention of connecting new concepts to the brand and the ambition to attract new customers. In some cases these plans and ambitions were never realised, in other cases they were. In all cases, however, new concepts were added to the brand or existing concepts were changed.

As a result of using the framework, the research is divided into two parts: (a) the investigation of the brand's current conceptual structure and (b) the investigation of the history of regulating actions.

Ad.A Structural analysis

By studying the changes in the conceptual structure of a brand systematically, we expect to gain more insight in the degrees of freedom of such a conceptual structure in categorizing products and customers while maintaining a certain degree of specificity. In all of the three cases, proposals to add new products and to reach new customers have led to changes in the conceptual structure of the brand. In some of the cases, these changes have led to regulating actions, which have had new conceptual consequences of their own. The theoretical framework of the previous chapter will be used for and tested as an instrument for analysing these conceptual changes. This 'structural investigation' can be divided in two parts.

- 1 The analysis of the ability of the core concepts to categorize products and customers. The variety potentially allowed by the core concepts is analysed by focusing on two factors: the nature of the concepts themselves (content) and the frame of reference provided by the core concepts (*form*). In each case, we will investigate these two factors.
- 2 The fact that branders add new (sub) concepts to the article concepts can have consequences for the specificity of the core concepts. The more inconsistencies arise between these new concepts and the existing core concepts, the higher the risk that the core concepts will lose specificity. Therefore, the second aspect we will be investigating in the structural analysis of the brand concept concerns the conceptual consequence of such regulating actions. This 'risk of losing specificity' will be analysed by studying the relationship between the core concepts and central distinctive subconcepts of the article concepts.

Ad.B Investigating the history of regulating actions

Adding new products to a brand can harm its specificity, but this does not necessarily have to be the case. This depends on the particular regu-

lating actions performed by the brand regulator. The brand regulator can reject products or add concepts in such a way that the specificity of the brand is maintained. An investigation of the history of regulating actions can clarify the differences in the way branders deal with the threat that their brand can lose specificity. Moreover, the analysis of the regulating actions can explain the existence of *particular* conceptual structures.

Research design

Since the research question focused on the identification of differences between branders and due to our theoretical underpinning of concept theory, we chose to perform qualitative research, more specifically the 'case study'. This made it possible to study in detail the differences between different organisations concerning the conceptual structures of their brands and in the ways of regulation performed by those responsible for branding.

We used two instruments to get material for an analysis of the elements of the conceptual structure. First of all, we interviewed the respondents and asked them for the more important and less important elements of the brand. We did this both for the brand 'in general' and for the 'articles'. This 'direct approach' is valid because we are interested in the brand identity – the concepts that are explicitly used by the brander⁸³. Secondly, we analysed written documents of the selected firms, such as strategic plans, brand identity maps and research data in order to complete the picture.

The investigation of the regulating actions was also conducted by means of interviews of the executives. An analysis of strategic plans and research reports was also used as important input.

Case and respondent selection

We have applied two criteria for the selection of the cases. First of all it was important that the cases should be developed (and not new) brands because the problems we wanted to study demanded that the brand already had an established conceptual structure. Each of the three selected brands existed longer than ten years. One of them existed more than ten years (Camel Trophy), another nearly a century (Mars) and the third even longer than two centuries (Douwe Egberts). A second criterion was that the brander in these cases should have (had) plans to attach new products to the brand. The three brands that we will describe in this chapter have in common that they are all confronted with an increased variety

pressure (new products to be added to the brand). However, they differ in the intensity of this variety pressure (the actual variety of products added to the brand).

In the first case, Mars, the brand has been introducing all kinds of different products (ice cream, milk, new kinds of candy bars, chocolate eggs). Before that, the brand was famous for one product in particular: one specific candy bar. Somehow the brand had developed from a 'one product brand' to a brand covering many other products. This happened in just a few years.

The second brand, Douwe Egberts Coffee, was and is the leader in the Dutch coffee market. The brand strategy that provided the basis for this position was the introduction of different kinds of coffee products, without however extending to other product categories than coffee.

The last case, Camel Trophy, describes a brand that has been extended to a great variety of articles. Conceptually, it was closely linked to the Camel cigarette brand, but it developed into an independent brand covering many products and services, ranging from events to wristwatches and shoes.

The respondents we used for these investigations were senior executives who were involved in the process of branding. The amount of people involved in that varied across the cases. In a case like Camel Trophy, only two persons were directly involved in the branding process. To ensure reliability, we looked for persons who were more indirectly involved. In the case of Douwe Egberts, we interviewed five persons. Because of the limited amount of people that could be interviewed in the case of Camel Trophy and Douwe Egberts, we returned to them three times to increase reliability of the results. In case of Mars, we investigated fifteen people. This was necessary because there were many people involved in that process. In all the cases, we also interviewed external people, i.e. senior executives at the brand's advertising agencies. We did not find strikingly different results between the internal brand executives and these external people.

In section 6.2., we will analyse the brand Mars, in section 6.3. the brand Douwe Egberts Coffee, in 6.4. the brand Camel Trophy. At the end of all sections, we will sum up the conclusions of the separate cases. A more in-depth comparison of the cases will be presented in the overall conclusion of chapter 7.

6.2 The brand Mars

6.2.1 *Introduction*

The Mars Corporation is a privately owned enterprise that is active in one hundred countries over five continents. Its main businesses are snack foods and pet care. The company started off in 1922 when Frank Mars and his son had an idea to produce a portable version of the chocolate malted milk, which they called 'Milky Way'. In Europe, this candy bar was introduced under the name 'Mars bar'. Next to the brands Snickers, Dove, M&M's and Bounty, the brand Mars is one of the most well known chocolate brands in Europe.

Our case is concentrated around the brand Mars. At the time of the research, there was a lack of consensus among the respondents of the Mars Corporation about what should be the core concepts of that brand. At that time, there existed two versions of the core concepts. Because of that, there also existed two versions of most article concepts. In section 6.2.2. we will identify these different versions of the core concepts as elements of the conceptual structure of Mars. In the same section, the various categories of products which are linked to the Mars brand will be identified as well as the various (sub) concepts at the level of the article concepts. In section 6.2.3, the categorizing abilities of both versions will be studied in terms of the variety they allow. As we will see, both versions provide different frames of reference and differ in the variety of products they allow. In section 6.2.4, the conceptual consequences of adding new articles to the brand will be investigated. Thus, we will be able to investigate differences between these two versions of the core concepts with respect to their ability to preserve specificity.

As the structural analysis will show, the conceptual structure of the brand Mars shows some weaknesses. In section 6.2.5, we will discuss the history of regulating actions performed by the Mars executives which explains some of these deficiencies. This history of regulating actions describes the regulating actions performed by accepting/rejecting products or changing concepts. Finally, in section 6.2.6. we will discuss some intermediate conclusions.

6.2.2 The elements within the conceptual structure of the brand Mars

6.2.2.1 Identity level

When asked about the core of the brand Mars, the executives were unanimous about at least one core concept: 'taste'. According to them, the most important and characteristic aspect of the brand was its particular taste. Except for this aspect, little consensus was reached about the other central elements of the brand identity. Results of the research indicate that there are two different versions of how the brand is defined by Mars' executives. The first version of the Mars identity concept, as defined by Mars executives, was clearly focussed on the eating characteristics of the standard candy bar, the original product by Mars. A small majority of the Mars executives believed that this was and should be the 'core' of Mars. The second version was –besides the aspect of taste –more focussed on the energy aspect of the brand. In paragraph 6.2.2.2. and 6.2.2.3. we will discuss both versions. In paragraph 6.2.2.3., we will discuss the article concepts of the brand Mars.

6.2.2.2 The first version of the core concepts: 'taste and eating experience'

The first version of the identity concept existed of the core concepts 'taste' and 'eating experience'. According to most Mars executives 'taste' and 'eating experience' are the central concepts of Mars. As clearly indicated by one of the executives:

"Actually in my view the brand is mostly wrapped up in physical attributes: the taste and the eating experience. Which are different from some brands. Some brands exist in people's minds as a more theoretical construct, but at least from what I have seen and in my opinion the Mars brand in particular is very much rooted in the specific taste and eating experience. There are many things that are attached to it. Consumers attach certain values, certain benefits to it.

But if you really try to sort out what is critical to it, it's very much fixed in the real world, it's the taste and the eating experience. As opposed to other brands, which are so theoretical in nature that they almost can exist as an idea in somebody's head independently of the physical product. Mars is not that at all."

This eating experience refers to 'texture', 'smoothness' and 'bite'. The

core concept 'eating experience' is related to the ingredients indicated below⁸⁴:

"Mars gives the consumer a very special eating experience. The special combination of ingredients, this texture, gives you a very smooth eat." And: "Clearly taste has to be a major consideration. I believe also bite height, the sensation in the mouth and the relationship between the centre ingredients and the chocolate."

Besides this version of the core concepts ('taste and eating experience') of the Mars brand, there was another version, which will be discussed below.

6.2.2.3 The second version of the core concepts: 'taste and energy'

Despite the fact that some Mars executives consider 'eating experience' as a central concept of the brand, an official brand identity document about the Mars brand reveals a different perspective on its central elements. It reflects the importance of the energy-aspect in the brand identity structure of the brand. As this document illustrates, the "USP" (unique selling proposition) of Mars is that is "helps me everyday" and "sustains during work, rest and play". They are both a reflection of the energy aspect of Mars:

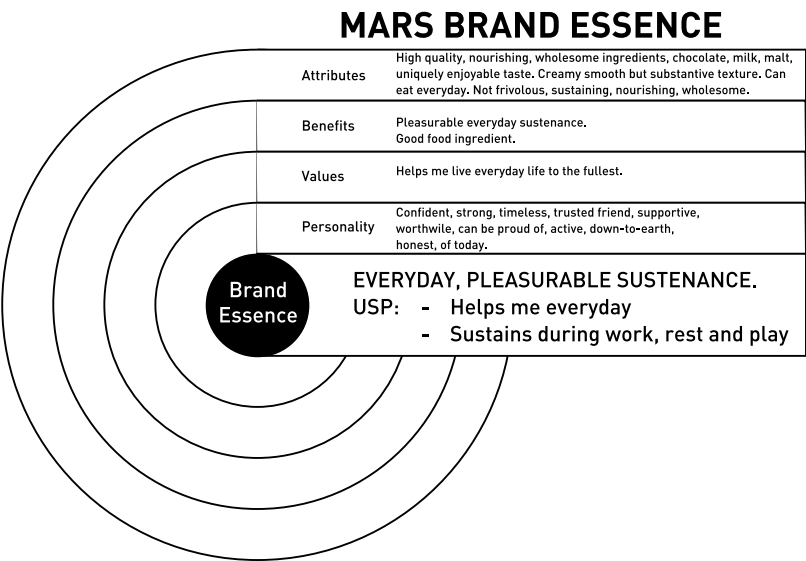


Figure 6.1 Brand essence document Mars.

The interviews show that the core concepts of the second version of the brand identity reflect a combination of the “taste” and “energy” aspect:

“It is a combination of some very solid taste elements and an energy driven image. That is very striking. Although we haven’t communicated this in years, the energy is in some cases even the first thing consumers think about.” And: “You should make a difference between functional/ instrumental values and emotional values. The first are caramel, malt. The emotional value is energy. Mars is a source of energy. Together they make the brand essence.” And: “For me it stands for a combination of on the one hand energy fulfilment and on the other hand a kind of an emotional fulfilment.” And: “Well consumers tend to associate with Mars the benefit of “vitality”, “energy”. In some countries they will define that physically, in other countries emotionally. And in some case both. But if you said that there’s a feeling of elevation and renewal “Mars brings me back to life”, which I think manifests itself both physically and emotionally. That is quite important to the brand.” And: “Two things are important. Mars has this energy proposition. That should be preserved. Secondly, it has this very special taste and ingredients. Those are the two things I would not change.

Hence, in this version of the brand identity, the core concepts of the brand are both ‘taste’ and ‘physical and emotional energy’.

As with the first version of the core concepts, the second version is also supported by peripheral (less important) subconcepts. Since these, also, do not play a role in our analysis, they are not described here.

All in all, the first and second version of the core concepts of Mars are:

	Version1	Version2
Core concepts	'taste', eating experience	'taste', 'physical/ emotional energy

Figure 6.2 Two versions of the core concepts

In the next section we will deal with the article concepts. Respectively, we will analyse the categories of products corresponding with the various article concepts and the separate (sub) concepts these article concepts consist of.

6.2.2.4 Article level

The categories of products attached to the Mars brand

Since the Mars products are not all 'candy bars' but display a greater variety than that, we asked the executives in what category of products the various articles in their opinion belonged to. In the table below, these different categories of products are depicted. In the right block, the article concepts are named and in the left block the corresponding category of products, as they are described by the Mars executives themselves.

Articles	Category of products
Mars standard bar	Candy bar
Mars multi	Candy bar
Mars minis	Candy bar
Mars Almond	Candy bar
Mars Ice Cream	Ice cream
Mars Ice Stick	Ice cream
Mars Milk	- Chocolate milk - Soft/energy drinks
Mars Egg	Chocolate for occasions
Mars Miniatures	- Lighter eat candy bar - Bite size

Figure 6.3 The category of products to which the article concepts belong

Some articles were considered to belong to more than one category of products. The Mars Milk for instance was considered to belong to two different categories of products. On the one hand, there were respondents who considered it to belong to the category chocolate drinks. According to them, Mars Milk is an article, which competes with other chocolate drinks, like Chocomel. On the other hand, respondents ascribed the article to the category of soft drinks containing the energy aspect, like cola. In that case, Coca-Cola or Pepsi-Cola were considered as competitors.

Mars Miniatures were also perceived to belong to two different categories of products. First of all, the article was presumed to belong to the category of ‘lighter eat candy bars’ of which Kitkat and Twix are examples. These ‘biscuit filled’ candy bars were considered as being a lighter eat than more traditional candy bars. Secondly, Mars Miniatures was considered to be a ‘bite size chocolate candy’, like Chocotoff. In shape and format Mars Miniatures and Chocotoff are very much alike.

The central distinctive subconcepts of the articles

The central distinctive subconcepts of an article are the subconcepts that determine the distinctness and singularity of the articles, needed to compete with other articles, as perceived by the brander. As we saw, all executives were unanimous about at least one core concept of the brand, the concept ‘taste’. That means that this concept was found as central distinc-

tive subconcept of the articles as well – if it was considered relevant. The role of the other core concept within the conceptual structure of the article concepts depended on the actual preference of executives for a particular version of the core concepts. Those executives who considered ‘eating experience’ as the other core concept of the brand also favoured it to be a central distinctive subconcept of many article concepts. At least, this is the case for the articles Mars standard bar, Mars multi, Mars minis, Mars Miniatures and Mars Ice Cream. Those who believed that ‘energy’, should be the other core concept of the brand, considered this concept to be the central distinctive subconcepts of some articles. Among these are the articles Mars standard bar, Mars multi and Mars Almond.

If it was considered relevant, either the core concept ‘energy’ or ‘eating experience’ was used as central distinctive subconcept of the article concepts, dependant on the preference of the executive for a particular core concept. Because of this lack of an unequivocal perspective on the choice of central distinctive subconcepts among the Mars executives, the concepts ‘eating experience’ and ‘energy’ in the scheme below are written in brackets.

Article concepts	Central distinctive subconcepts
Mars standard bar	Taste, (eating experience), (energy)
Mars multi	Taste, (eating experience), (energy)
Mars minis	Taste, (eating experience), (energy), lighter eat, young children
Mars Miniatures	Taste, (eating experience), (energy), lightest eat, indulgence, premium, women’s product
Mars Ice Cream	Taste, (eating experience), refreshment
Mars Ice Stick	Taste, (ice-like experience), refreshment
Mars Milk	Tasty, milky, (energy)
Mars Egg	Taste, lighter eat, pleasure
Mars Almond	Taste, almond, (energy)

Figure 6.4 The central distinctive subconcepts of the article concepts

So, dependent on the preference of a Mars executive for a particular identity concept, the central distinctive subconcepts 'taste' and 'eating experience', just 'taste' or the combination 'taste' and 'energy' are considered as central distinctive subconcepts of the article concepts. Besides these, some article concepts have central distinctive subconcepts 'of their own', as in the case of the articles Mars Minis, Mars Miniatures, Mars Ice Cream, Mars Ice Stick, and Mars Egg.

In figure 6.3., 6.4., 6.5., the concepts in the conceptual structure of the brand Mars are represented. In the next two paragraphs we will diagnose respectively the categorizing ability of the core concepts in terms of the variety they can allow (6.2.3) and the conceptual consequences of adding new concepts (6.2.4.).

6.2.3 The categorizing ability of the core concepts

In the previous paragraphs, we have identified the (sub)concepts of the brand Mars, both at the identity level and at the article level. In this section, we will investigate the ability of the core concepts to categorize a variety of products and customers.

The differences in categorizing abilities between concepts can be explained by a) the kind of frame of reference the core concepts provide, i.e. the form of the brand's core concepts and b.) the content of the concepts themselves. The differences between the two versions of the core concepts will be discussed accordingly.

6.2.3.1 Differences in the form and content of the core concepts

Different core concepts have different abilities for categorization. Therefore we can expect differences between the two versions of the identity concept when it comes to the degrees of freedom they provide in categorizing products and customers. To investigate how core concepts can categorize products and customers in this case – attribute some sort of 'order' to them – we study both the form and content of these concepts.

The form of the core concepts refers to the frame of reference as provided by them. The core concepts of both versions of the identity of Mars provide a similar kind of frame of reference for products: a *feature frame of reference*. The core concepts of the brand Mars are not a bundle of features typical to a kind of product which are shared by all the article con-

cepts. In that case, the core concepts would provide a taxonomic frame of reference. In both versions, the core concepts of Mars represent only two features that are added to the articles. Neither do they belong to a domain that is different from the product domain the articles belong to. Both 'taste and energy' and 'taste and eating experience' are features of products.

Although both versions of the core concepts share the same form, they are different with respect to their content. A product like 'drinks' can match with the feature energy and not with the feature eating experience. In other words, the differences in the content of both versions result in differences in their ability to categorize products and customers.

6.2.3.2 Differences in the categorization of products

Based on their form – providing a feature frame of reference – the core concepts of the first version allow the following variety of products to be categorized: all the products which meet a specific taste and eating experience. Products only have to meet these two features. The possibilities for categorizing a variety of products as provided by the concepts 'taste' and 'eating experience' is thus determined by the degree to which one can manipulate products in such way that they fit these two features. This can be illustrated by the following quote:

"And if we ever come up with an egg that eats properly like a Mars bar, then we go back and do it." And: "The egg can be a perfect extension, if we get it right."

As these quotes illustrate, the Mars Egg is not considered as a good example of the concepts 'taste and eating experience'. The degree of variety the core concepts can allow is based on the degree to which they can be manipulated so that they fit the concept.

The same is true for the second version of the core concepts, taste and energy. They are also features that can be added to different categories of products. As we described, the concept energy has both a physical side - referring to the ingredients- and an emotional side -which is supported and nurtured by the advertising of Mars. The core concepts allow a variety of different products: from a chocolate energy milk drink and a chocolate energy candy bar to a chocolate energy candy.

Although the form is the same, there is a difference between both versions of core concepts when it comes to the content. The degree of freedom that is left open for the Mars' manufacturing to make new products

is more limited when it has to be loyal to the specific taste and eating experience of the original Mars bar. The core concepts taste and eating experience are strongly related to the human senses. New products have to deliver against a similar satisfaction of the senses. As the quotes show this is not easy.

The variety allowed by the concepts 'taste' and 'energy' also depends on the manufacturing abilities, since the new products have to deliver on the same kind of taste. However, the core concepts energy and taste are less restricting. The products only have to include certain ingredients (like glucose, milk) to make sure they provide physical energy and have to be advertised accordingly. The emotional aspect of energy does not put many restraints on the manufacturing abilities. It puts restraints on the ability to create a proper context and to add the proper symbols, mainly via advertising. Since the variety of products that can be categorized by the concept energy is less restrictive to the manufacturing abilities less and can be made credible by just adding certain features or by putting the product in the right context via advertising, the variety of products which can be associated with 'energy' in principle can be larger than the variety allowed by the concept eating experience.

6.2.3.3 Differences in the categorization of customers

In the Mars case, the categorization of customers is based on the degree to which customers are attracted to certain features. In the case of the first version of the identity concept, the customers that are grouped together by the concept is assumed to prefer the specific taste and eating experience. The second version of the identity concept categorizes customers who are not only attracted to the Mars taste, but also to the energy aspect of the brand.

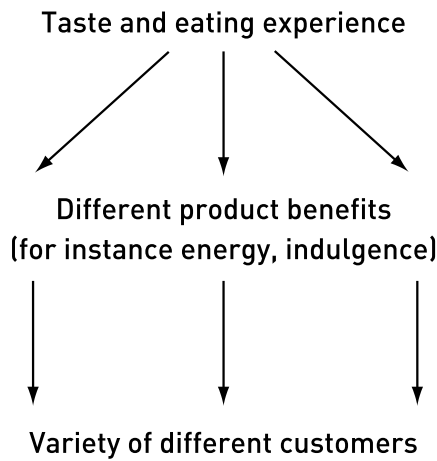


Figure 6.5 Categorization of customers based on 'taste and eating experience'

As in the case of categorization of products, the differences between the two versions of the core concepts with respect to customers obviously relates to the content of the concepts, while the form is the same. The first version of the identity concept leaves a lot of space for categorizing a variety of different people. It leaves possibilities for sophisticated categorizations based on different product benefits in relationship to target groups for instance.

As such, new products have arisen from new categorizations of customers:

"The minis is favourite for younger children. But, the Mars miniatures are a result from a further segmentation of customers that like the Mars taste. Part of the problem, for young people the attraction of Mars is its size, but when you are older, maybe also female, you are still emotionally loyal to Mars. You love the taste, but committing yourself to eat sixty or sixty two grams is a bit much."

As a result, the Mars Miniature was introduced. So, just because the first version of the core concepts does not specify the customer's additional preferences, it leaves a variety of possibilities for categorizing new specific groups of customers.

The second version of the core concepts is also open to more sophisticated categorizations. However, the specific categorization that is implied in the concept *energy* brings along specific restrictions. As one of the executives indicated:

"Positioning the brand only by energy brings great risks. If we do so, we will deter a great group of consumers People that are not so active and like to watch television all day, also eat Mars." And: "We have to be very careful in stressing the energy aspects of the brand too much. Because focus on energy chases away consumer groups. People who are lazy by nature and like to spend their time watching television also eat Mars. You have to watch out. The brand should not be associated too much with a source of energy with can help you to play tennis or base-ball. That's why we went back and say "everyday a Mars bar."

Although such restriction is felt by the executives, the core concepts 'energy' and 'taste' are also open to differentiation by more sophisticated categorizations. For instance, based on the concept energy, a further differentiation based on product attributes is possible, like eating experience, thereby addressing a variety of different customers:

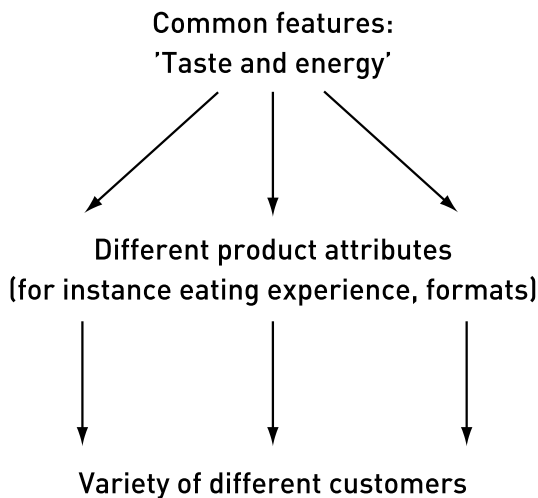


Figure 6.6 Categorization of customers based on 'taste' and 'energy'

So, the categorizing abilities of both versions of the identity concept are based on the principle that they provide two features, which are shared by the products under the brand name. Based on the form of both versions of the core concepts, we can conclude that the differences between them in absorbing variety cannot be related to 'the way they categorize' products and customers. Both employ the same frame of reference. Differences between the two versions with respect to the variety absorbing

ability can be traced back to '*what they categorize*': products or customers.

The core concepts 'taste' and 'energy' (the second version) allow a greater variety of products because they put fewer restrictions on the way a product satisfies the senses. They do put more restrictions on how *people* should benefit from these products; i.e. they have to give energy. They are open, however, to categorizations based on specific product characteristics (formats, eating characteristics, ingredient specifications). The core concepts 'taste' and 'eating experience' put more restrictions on the actual variety of products that can be categorized. They put fewer restrictions on how people should benefit from eating these products. They are open to further categorizations of customers based on the way that they could benefit from these products (indulgence, energy, etc).

6.2.4 *The risk of losing specificity*

As discussed in the previous chapter, adding new products, customers or concepts to the brand can lead to a decrease in specificity of the core concepts. In this section, we will study this risk by analysing the conceptual structure of the brand Mars. We will do so by investigating the relationship between the core concepts and the central distinctive subconcepts separately for the two versions of the core concepts. Thus, we determine the strength of the ties between these two kinds of concepts. The weaker the links between the core concepts and the central distinctive subconcepts of the articles, the higher the risk that the specificity of the core concepts – and in consequence that of the brand – will be diluted. The stronger the links, the more the core concepts define the singularity of the article concepts. We identified four types of links:

Instance links: strong link between the core concepts and the article concepts. All core concepts are the same as the central distinctive subconcepts of the articles.

Similarity links: weaker link between the core concepts and the article concepts. The article concepts also have central distinctive subconcepts defining its singularity, next to all the core concepts.

Transformational links: an even weaker link between the core concepts and the article concepts. At least one of the core concepts plays a less explicit role in defining the singularity of the article concepts.

Contradiction links: weakest link. At least one of the core concepts is contradictory to the central distinctive subconcepts of the article concepts.

First of all, we will investigate the links between the first version of the core concepts (‘taste’ and ‘eating experience’) and the article concepts. Secondly, we will discuss the links between the second version (‘taste’ and ‘energy’) and the article concepts.

The first version of the core concepts

Figure 6.7. below shows the central distinctive subconcepts as mentioned by executives who considered ‘taste’ and ‘eating experience’ as the core concepts.

Article concepts	Central distinctive subconcepts
Mars standard bar	Taste, eating experience
Mars multi	Taste, eating experience
Mars minis	Taste, eating experience, lighter eat, young children
Mars Miniatures	Taste, eating experience, lightest eat, indulgence, premium, women’s product
Mars Ice Cream	Taste, eating experience, refreshment
Mars Ice Stick	Taste, ice-like experience, refreshment
Mars Milk	Tasty, milky drink
Mars Egg	Taste, lighter eat, pleasure
Mars Almond	Taste, almond

Figure 6.7 The central distinctive subconcepts of the article concepts (first version)

As the table shows, the central distinctive subconcepts do not match the core concepts in all cases perfectly. Some articles, like the Mars standard bar, have central distinctive subconcepts, which are the same as the core concepts. The Mars bar is strongly related to the core concepts. In other cases, like the Mars milk, some of the central distinctive subconcepts are contradictory to one of the core concepts. In that case, the article is weakly related to the core concepts.

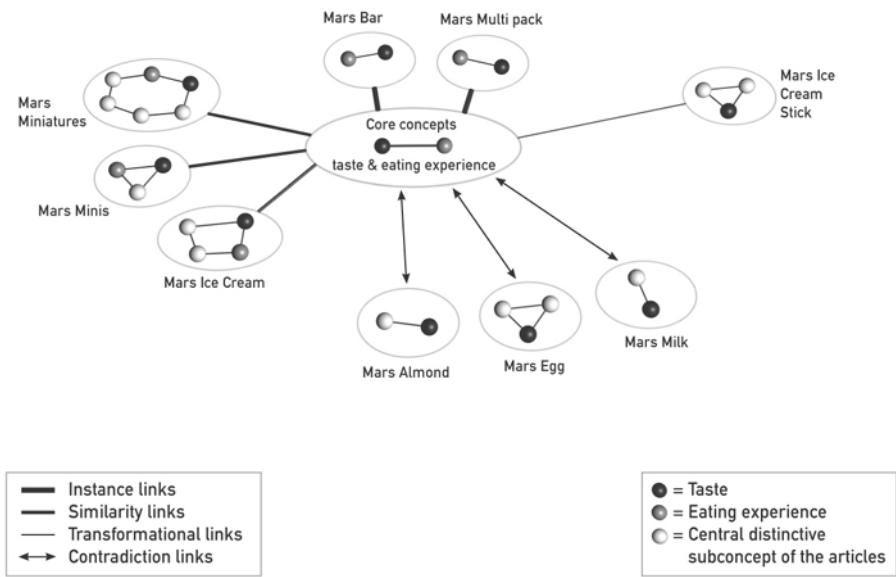


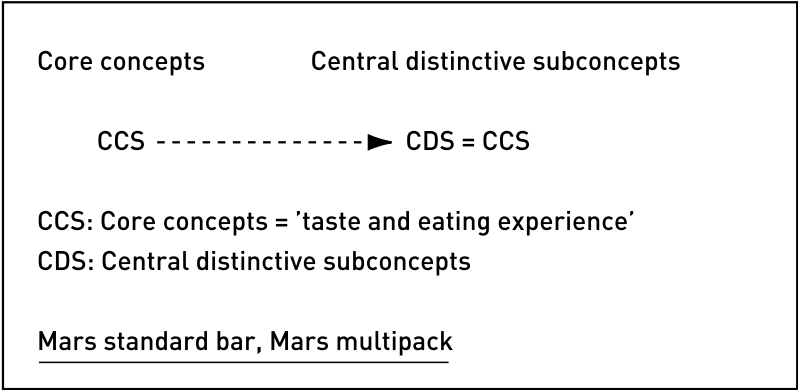
Figure 6.8 The links between the first version of the core concepts and the central distinctive subconcepts of the article concepts

In case of this first version, all four kinds of relationships (instance, similarity, transformational and contradiction links) appear in the conceptual structure.

This is depicted in figure 6.8 above. We will study them now in greater detail. below

Instance links: Mars standard bar, Mars multipack

In the case of the instance links the core concepts are directly used as central distinctive subconcepts in the article concept. As mentioned, the core concepts of the first version of the identity concept are 'taste' and 'eating experience'. When we look at figure 6.7.. we can conclude that exactly these concepts also appear as central distinctive concepts of two articles: Mars standard bar and Mars multi. In the case of these two articles the core concepts are used directly as central distinctive subconcepts at the level of the articles. Schematically:



The executives consider the Mars standard bar as the most important representation of the brand. It symbolizes most directly the core concepts of Mars:

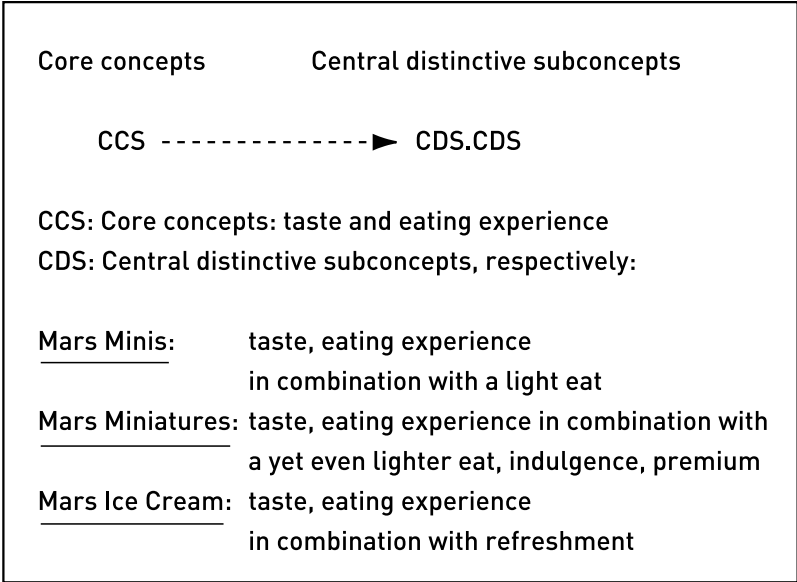
“For me the core brand Mars is the single bar. I would probably include multi-packs. I wouldn’t include snack size, ice creams, Miniatures and drinks. The core proposition is the big bar.”

The reason for this is that the Mars candy bar is the best example of the taste and eating experience of Mars:

“Clearly taste has to be a major consideration. I believe also bite height, the sensation in the mouth and the relationship between the center ingredients and the chocolate. All those together give the essence which is essentially Mars. When you move away from that, by definition you deliver something which isn’t totally Mars but is almost Mars.”

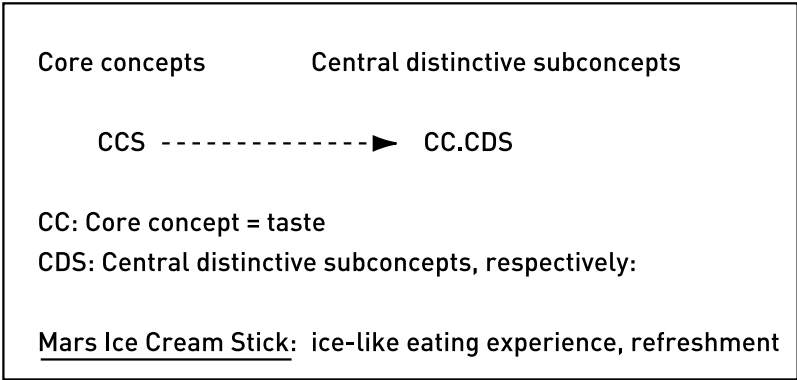
Similarity links: Mars Minis, Mars Miniatures, Mars Ice Cream Snack.

In the case of the similarity links the central distinctive subconcepts of the article concept are a combination of all core concepts and other central distinctive subconcepts. we can conclude that the central distinctive subconcepts of three articles are built upon such a combination. Schematically:



Transformational links: Mars Ice Cream Stick.

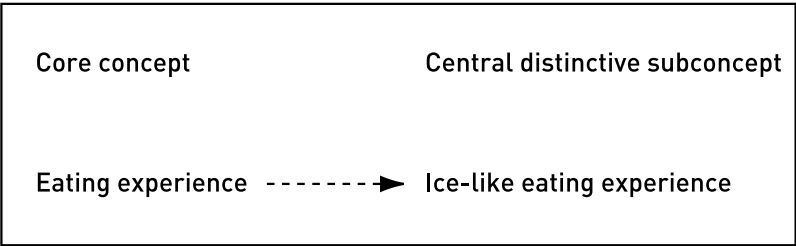
Here, the conceptual structures of the identity concept and the article concept are related by transformational links; at least one of the core concepts does not appear directly as central distinctive subconcept at the level of the article concept. However, they are related and not contradictory. In this version of the core concepts, at least one of the core concepts appears as central distinctive subconcept, that is the concept ‘taste’. The other core concept ‘eating experience’ does not appear ‘directly’ as central distinctive subconcept, but in a transformed way.



The conceptual structure of one article is linked with a transformational link to the first version of the identity concept: Mars Ice Cream Stick. In this case, the Mars “eating experience” referred to by the core concepts is transformed in other sorts of products. Still, taste is the central distinctive subconcepts of Mars Ice Cream Stick. Only, in case of the Ice Stick is the eating experience considered different, though related to the one considered as core. It has been slightly changed, but is not considered contradictory with the Mars eating experience as reflected by the core concepts:

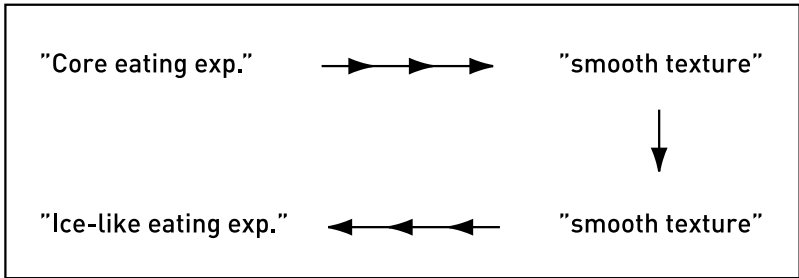
“The Mars Ice Stick is more what you might expect from a particular kind of ice cream, the one which is black on the outside and has white creamy ice on the inside.”

Unlike the Mars Ice Cream bar, the eating experience of the ice cream stick is more an eating experience, which you might expect from an ice



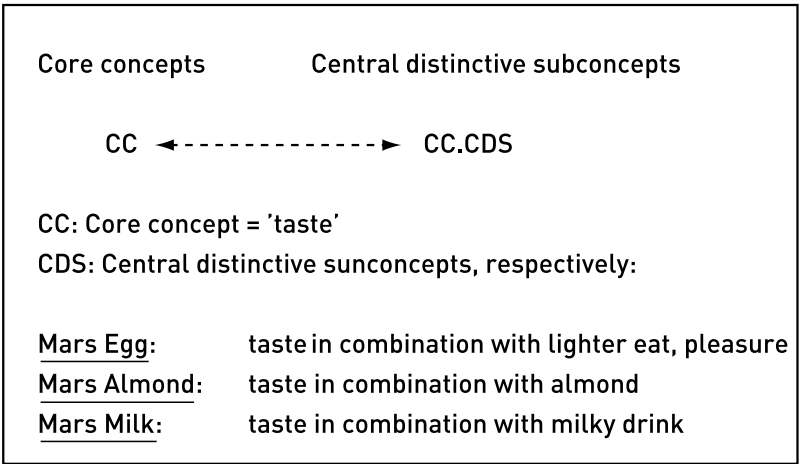
cream:

With respect to the Mars Ice Stick, the eating experience of the core concepts is transformed into the eating experience of a traditional ice cream stick. The result of this transformation (the ‘ice like eating experience’) is a specification of the eating experience offered by the brand Mars. The latter experience does not equal the eating experience represented by the core concepts. However, it still fits the eating experience. Mars Ice Stick is smooth and has the same texture as the Mars bar. The match between the eating experience of the identity concept and that of the article concept can be portrayed like this:



Contradiction links: Mars Egg, Mars Almond and Mars Milk

If at least one of the core concepts does not appear as central distinctive subconcept of a particular article, but is contradictory with it, the conceptual structures of both concepts are related by a contradiction link. In case of the first version of the core concepts we deal with here, there are three of these links: Mars Egg, Mars Almond and Mars Milk.



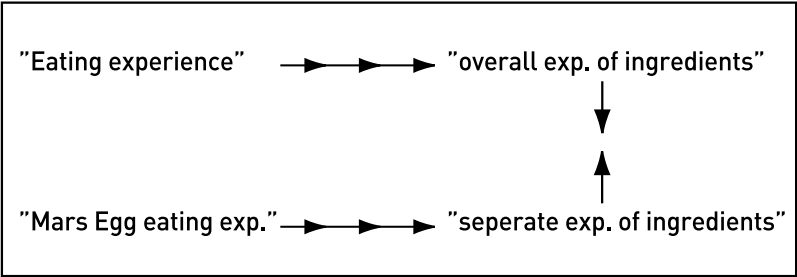
In these cases there is a mismatch between the core concept 'eating experience' and the central distinctive subconcepts of the article. We will now focus on the mismatch between the central distinctive subconcept of the article and one of the core concepts: 'eating experience'.

With the Mars Egg the source of the contradiction lies in the "texture". This can be shown by the following quotes

"For instance, we have a Mars filled egg in the UK and it didn't really quite deliver the taste and certainly not the overall eat texture, and part

of the reason was because in the delivery of the filled egg you tended to have the components a bit more separate you didn't get as much mix in the egg. We agreed that we 're not gonna do that anymore. And if we ever come up with an egg that eats properly like a Mars bar, than we go back and do it."

Mars Egg:

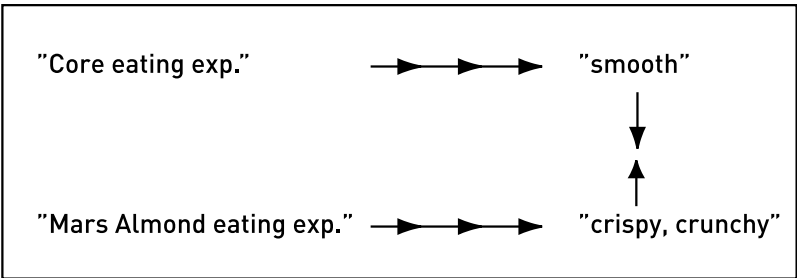


From the perspective of the first version of the identity concept, there also appears to be a mismatch between the conceptual structure of the Mars Almond and that of the Mars identity:

"I think a bad extension is Almond bar, because it just changes the eat-characteristics. The smoothness is important in the brand, so the crunchiness seems to be wrong here." And "We introduced the Mars Almond. Mars has always had these smooth characteristics. It never had these crispy, hard elements. Those big pieces of almond did not fit into the concept of Mars."

Hence the mismatch was based on the following contradiction:

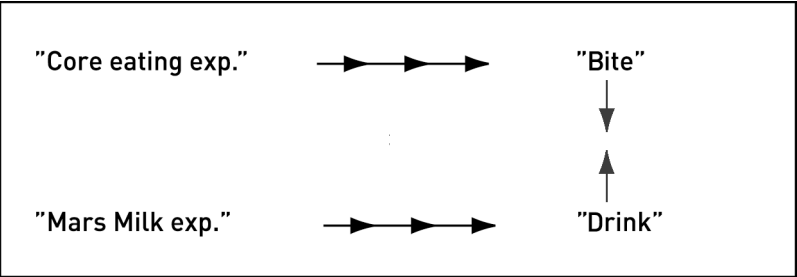
Mars Almond:



The last contradiction link that appears when investigating the relationship between the first version of the brand identity and the article concept of the Mars Milk:

"Mars milk, I have some concerns about. The taste is good. The milk is a quality product, is right. To me Mars is something you chew, but this is one of the things we are looking at."

Mars Milk:



Clearly, this mismatch is perceived among some executives at Mars. An illustration of this can be found for instance in the way they positioned the Mars Milk:

"We are positioning the Mars Milk more like food compared to competitors like Coca Cola. Those are really soft drinks. Our core is more based on milk, they only have sugar."

So far for the analysis of the way the first version of the core concepts is related to the article concepts. In the next part of this paragraph, we will discuss the second version of the core concepts.

The second version of the core concepts

The table below describes the central distinctive subconcepts of the articles as they are mentioned by the executives who consider 'taste' and 'energy' as the core concepts:

Article concepts	Central distinctive subconcepts
Mars standard bar	Taste, energy
Mars multi	Taste, energy
Mars minis	Taste, energy, lighter eat, young children
Mars Miniatures	Taste, lightest eat, indulgence, premium, women's product
Mars Ice Cream	Taste, refreshment
Mars Ice Stick	Taste, ice-like experience, refreshment
Mars Milk	Tasty, energy
Mars Egg	Taste, lighter eat, pleasure
Mars Almond	Taste, energy, almond

Figure 6.9 The central distinctive subconcepts of the article concepts (second version)

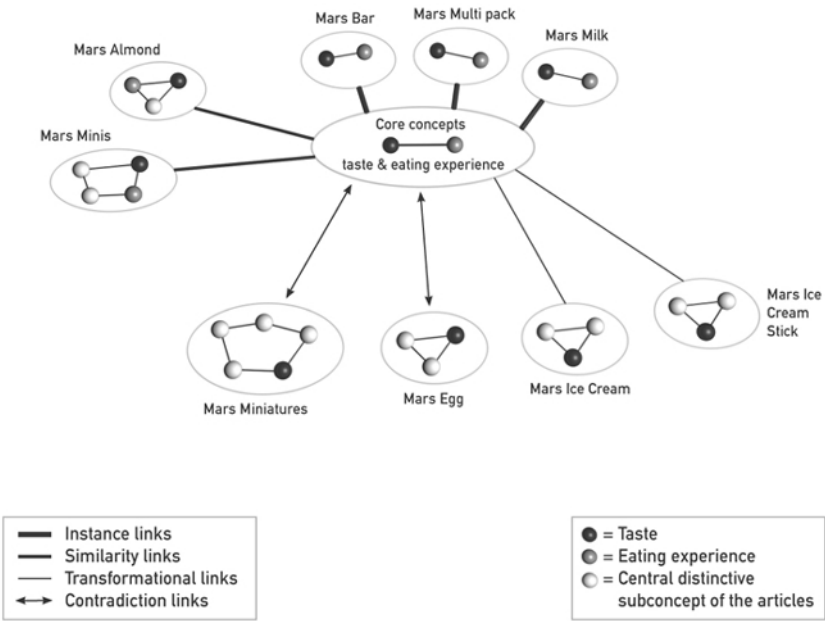


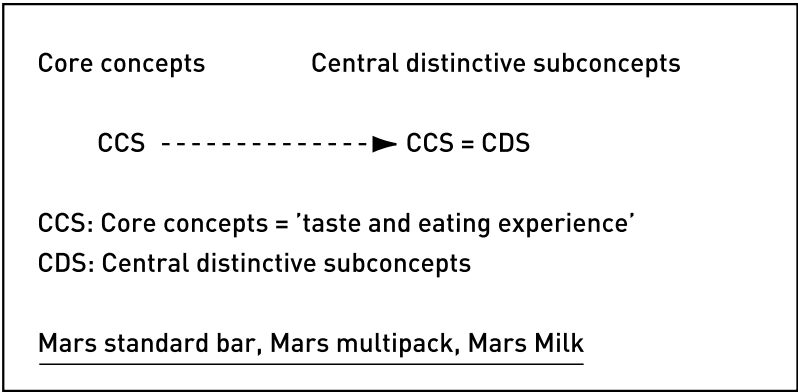
Figure 6.10 The links between the second version of the core concepts and the central distinctive subconcepts of the article concepts

As we saw in the previous paragraph, the executives who embraced a different version of the core concepts also had different versions of the central distinctive subconcepts. By the same token, the links between the core concepts and the central distinctive subconcepts are different, dependant on the version of the core concepts that is favoured. For instance, we saw in our description of the first version of the core concepts that one of the central distinctive subconcepts of Mars Milk is in contradiction with one of the core concepts (*eating experience*). The second version of the brand identity concept incorporates the Mars “taste” and “energy” as core concepts. Considered from this perspective of the second version of the identity concept the core concepts do not contradict at all with the central distinctive subconcepts of the article concept. In fact, both are linked to each other with an instance link! In other words, the kind of version of the concept determines the degree to which the identity concept and article concepts are linked. This will be explained and discussed in this section.

We will now describe the links depicted above in greater detail.

Instance links: Mars standard bar, Mars multi, Mars Milk

As table 6.9. shows, executives by Mars make no difference between the central distinctive subconcepts of the article concepts Mars and Mars Multipacks on the one hand and the core concepts on the other. They are linked via an instance link. In contrast with the first version of the identity concept, the second version of the identity concept is also linked with another article by an instance link: the Mars Milk.



As the table above shows, the central distinctive subconcepts of this article concept are also 'taste' and 'energy'. Executives that preferred this second version of the core concepts, considered the Mars standard bar as being closely linked to the core concepts. However, this status was not based on the eating experience of the standard bar. It was based on the fact that the Mars bar stood for energy:

"Energy has always been a key aspect of the brand Mars in times it was only a candy bar. We had the Mars cycling team. In the UK there was the slogan: A Mars a day helps you work rest of the day.'(work, rest and play?)."

The Mars Multipack was seen as a variant of the standard bar, representing the same feature of 'energy'. Moreover, the Mars milk was considered as an important representation of the core concepts as well. In this version of the core concepts, it is strongly linked to the core concept 'energy': This is supported by the executives of Mars:

"The drink, the most extreme, is an energy drink." And: "The fact that the milk is sweet definitely has a function here: it is the basis of the energy Mars drink delivers. Mars drink delivers energy. A drink can give you energy. Look at all the energy drinks, like ISOSTAR."

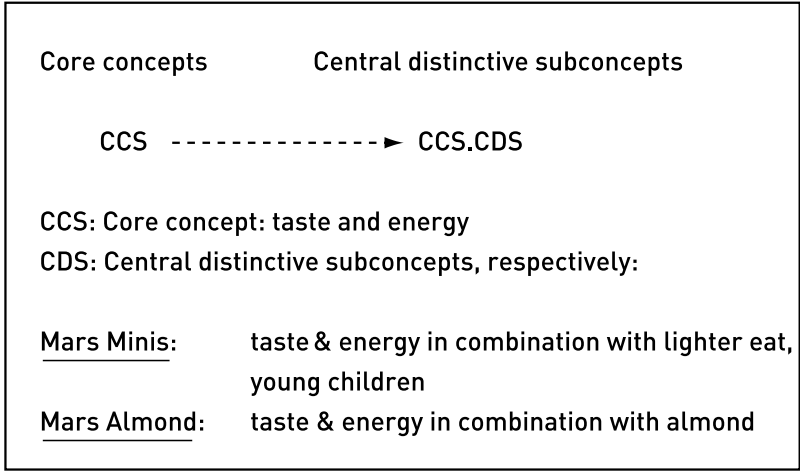
Except for the concept "energy" another central distinctive subconcept is 'taste':

"That fits the positioning: the taste of Mars Milk is the taste of the Mars bar. It's not just a milk, in that case we should not call it Mars. In the Mars Milk you taste the caramel and chocolate."

As we saw in the previous section, the conceptual structures of the first version of the identity concept and article concept of Mars milk were linked with contradiction links. Here however, we see that the core concepts are reproduced directly by the central distinctive subconcepts of the article concept of Mars Milk (instance link).

Similarity links: Mars Minis, Mars Almond

If the core concepts and article concept are linked with a similarity link, the central distinctive subconcepts of the article concept consist of a combination of central distinctive subconcepts of the article concept and the core concepts. Two article concepts are linked to the second version of the identity concept by similarity links: Mars Minis and Mars Almond.

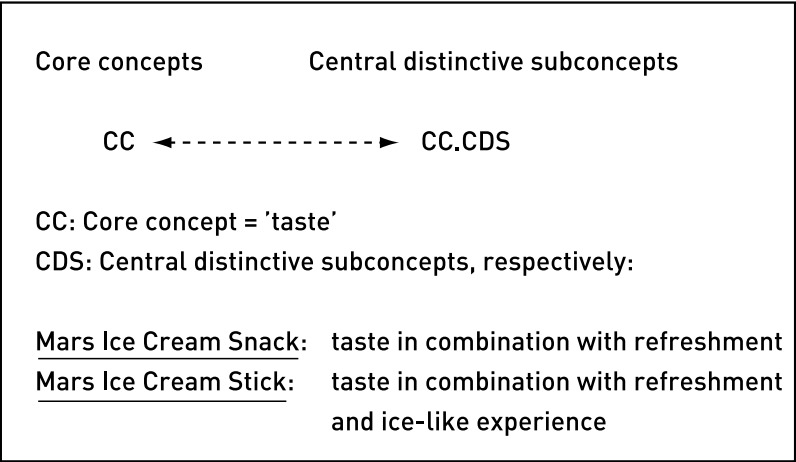


As figure 6.9. shows, the central distinctive subconcepts at the level of the article concept are a combination of “energy” and “taste” on the one hand and “light eat”, “young children” on the other.

The other similarity link relates the second version of the identity concept to the article concept of Mars Almond. In paragraph 6.4.2.2.. we saw that the article concept of Mars Almond is linked to the first version of the identity concept with a contradiction link. From that perspective, the “smooth” Mars eating experience conflicts with the “crunchy” Almond eating experience. The second version puts the concepts “taste” and “energy” in a central position. From this perspective, the Almond is a combination of on the one hand the Mars “taste” and “energy” concepts and on the other hand the “almond” concept. Mars Almond is a Mars bar that combines the qualities of Mars (e.g. energy) with almond ingredients.

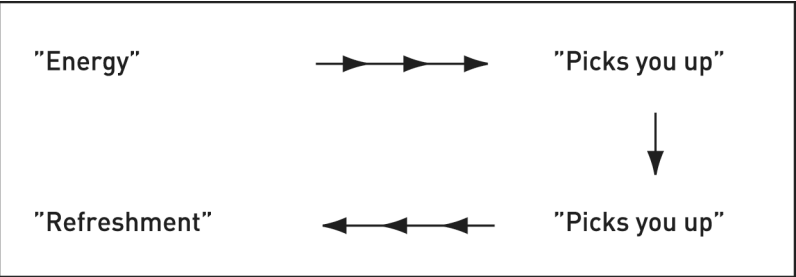
Transformational links: Mars Ice Cream, Mars Ice Stick

In two cases, the articles of the Mars brand are related to the core concepts by transformational links: in the case of the Mars Ice Cream Snack and the Mars Ice Cream Stick. Although the core concept ‘taste’ appears as central distinctive subconcept, the core concept ‘energy’ does not appear explicitly as central distinctive subconcept. Instead, the concept ‘refreshment’ is one of the central distinctive subconcepts. This concept is related though not contradictory to the core concept ‘energy’:



The concept 'refreshment' can be considered as a transformation of the concept 'energy'. The result of this transformation is a specification: the concept refreshment is a specification of the concept energy.

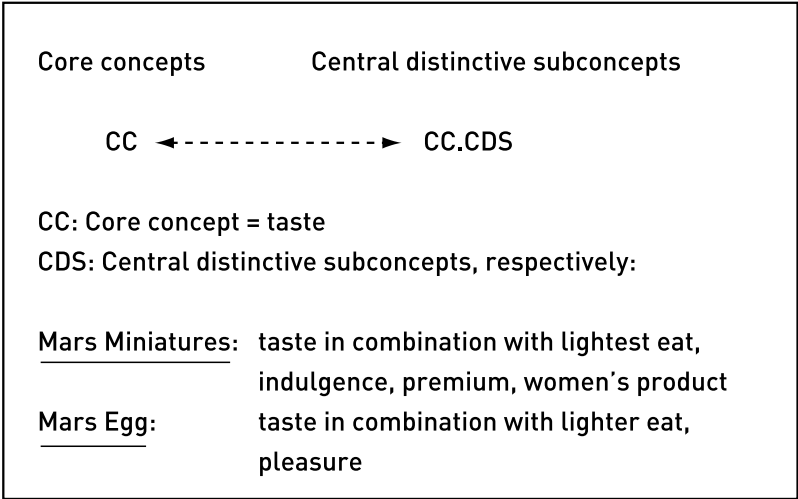
With respect to the Mars Ice Cream Snack and the Mars Ice Stick, the energy of the core concepts is transformed into the energy one can get from an ice cream: refreshment. The underlying commonality between the concepts energy and refreshment is that both can 'pick you up':



So, from a conceptual point of view, we can argue that the core concept ‘energy’ is transformed into a comparable concept that is relevant in the ice product category; refreshment.

Contradiction links: Mars Miniatures, Mars Egg

The second version of the core concepts is linked to two article concepts by contradiction links.



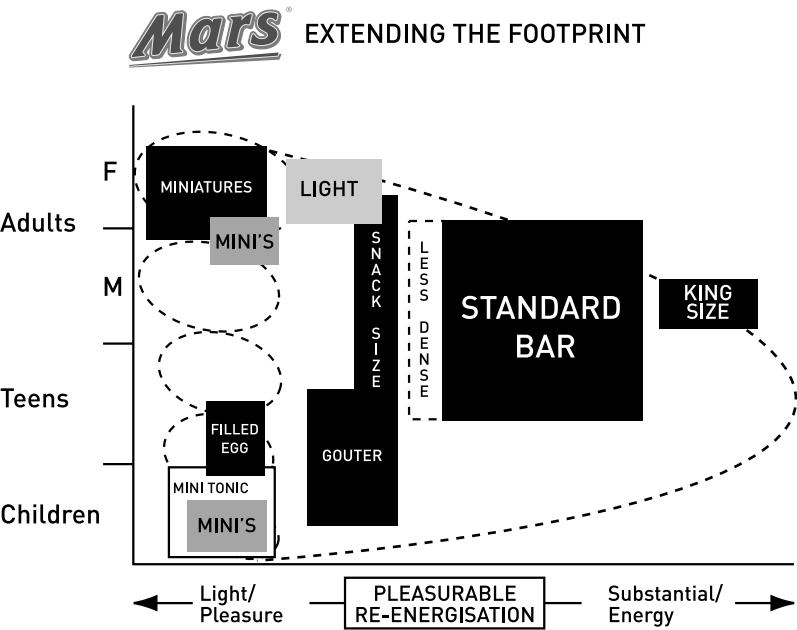
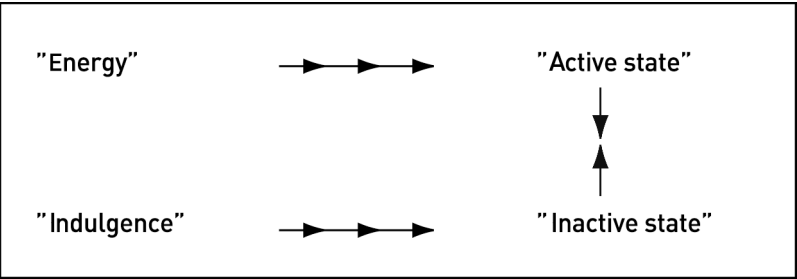
The central distinctive subconcepts of the article concept of Mars Miniatures are “light eat” ‘indulgence’ and ‘female target’:

“We have introduced Mars Miniatures because we had a problem with the market. We discovered that people who ate a Mars stop doing that when they pass the age of 35. The reason for that is that they think of Mars as too heavy. That’s why we introduced it in a smaller portion and position it for an older target group, especially women: instead of hunger satisfaction and energy the Miniatures are positioned as “indulgence”. And: “No, energy is exactly what the Miniatures do not stand for. In the perception of women the perception must not be that you gain weight with these.” And: “Mars Miniatures is pure indulgence, not energy at all.”

As the quotes indicate the Mars Miniatures stand for “indulgence”. There are contradictory elements in its relationship to energy. Mars Miniatures give the consumer an experience of gratification, satisfaction or pleasure, which means basically a state of inactiveness. By way of con-

trast, Mars giving you energy drives you to be active. It's the contrast of Mars as a motor or satisfyer⁸⁵:

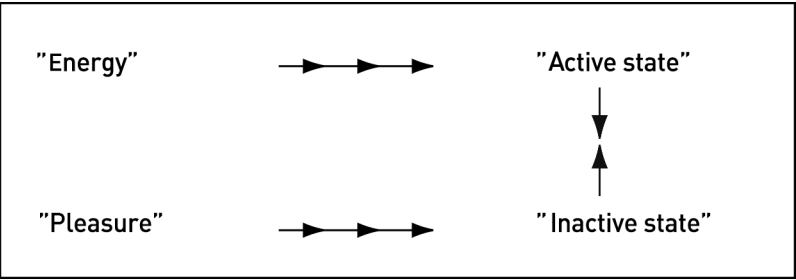
Mars Miniatures



Mars Footprint

What the footprint shown above indicates is that the Mars Egg is positioned in the direction of more “lighter eats” and “pleasure” or “Easter egg”, which means that we can indicate a similar kind of contradiction:

Mars Egg



As the analysis in this section shows, both cases of the core concepts have strong as well as weak links with particular article concepts. In the next section, we will discuss the conceptual structure of both versions of the core concepts in the light of specificity loss of the brand Mars⁸⁶.

In conclusion, we have seen that, in case of the brand Mars, there are two versions of the core concepts. That means that the specificity of the brand could be threatened because there is confusion about the essential variables. The specificity of the brand is threatened because there are two versions of the core concepts.

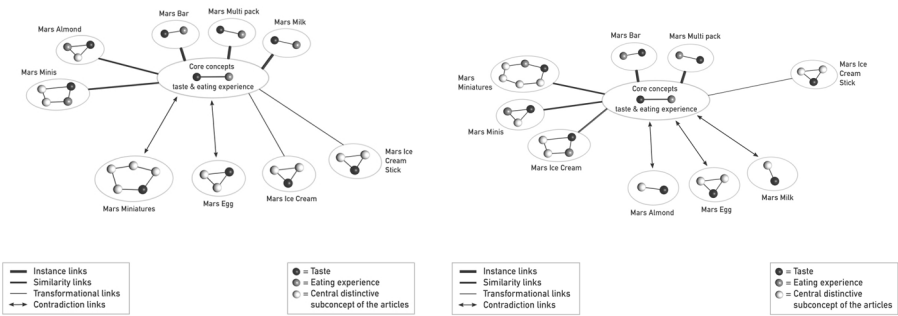


Figure 6.15 The two versions of the core concepts

There is a difference between the two versions of the brand concept in terms of the degree to which they are threatened to lose specificity. This is illustrated in figure 6.15 above. As we can see from this, one core concept is systematically present as a central distinctive subconcept: the core concept 'taste'. Both versions are equal in this respect. It diminishes the danger of losing specificity. Also when it comes to the relationship between the core concepts and the central distinctive subconcepts, the differences between them is minimal.

In the first version of the core concepts, the relation between the core concept: the concept 'taste' is related conceptually with the other concept 'eating experience'. Both concepts – taste and eating experience – are linked to a sort of 'network of articles' that all share the same taste and eating experience. Two of them, the Mars standard bar and the Mars Multi Pack are the best representatives of this taste and eating experience. The articles Mars Miniatures, Mars Minis and even the Mars ice cream are variants of that taste and eating experience. They had separate additional features, but share the core concepts. This is a solid part of the conceptual structure of the brand, all reinforcing and supporting the core concepts. As such, this network is not at all threatening to the specificity of the core concepts. However, one of the two core concepts – 'eating experience' – was not 'distributed' at all the articles. The Mars Ice Stick deviates from that typical 'Mars eating experience', so it is linked to the core concepts by a transformational link. The Mars eating experience is transformed into an ice-like eating experience. The other articles are weakly related to the core concepts: Mars Egg, Mars Almond and Mars Milk. They represent different eating experiences as well. Despite these threats, the brand has a solid core of articles strongly related to the core concepts. There is still a threat however, just because some of the articles are weakly linked to the brand.

In the second version of the core concepts the increased variety pressure has also not lead to a big danger of specificity loss, judged from a conceptual analysis. Like the first version of the core concepts, at least one core concept appears as central distinctive subconcept: the concept 'taste'. The article that is also most strongly related to the core concepts is the Mars candy bar. Moreover, like the first version of the core concepts, the core concepts of this second version appear as central distinctive subconcepts in case of five articles. Besides these, the core concept 'energy' appears as a central distinctive subconcept in a transformed way, in case of the Mars Ice Cream Snack and Mars Ice Cream Stick. There are two arti-

cles – the Mars Egg and Mars Miniatures – that are linked to the core concepts by contradiction link. Unlike the first version of the core concepts, the relation between the core concepts ‘taste’ and ‘energy’ is less obvious.

From the analysis of the conceptual structure of the brand, we can conclude that the increased variety pressure has endangered the specificity of the brand to small degree. This is the case because there is an ambiguity with respect to the essential variables. Both versions of these differ less with respect to danger of specificity loss. In both cases there are some article concepts that are weakly related to the core concepts, but in most cases (five out of the nine article concepts) the core concepts appear explicitly as central distinctive subconcepts.

In the next section, we will investigate the regulating actions of the brander. This investigation will not only give insight in how such structure could be constructed it also provides information about the abilities of the brander Mars to perform regulating actions.

6.2.5 A history of regulating actions

6.2.5.1 Introduction

As we described in the first section of this chapter, we can distinguish between different kinds of regulating options. In the case of Mars, only three of these were used. These are depicted below in bold. These will be discussed in the paragraphs described in brackets behind.

	Reactive	Proactive
Regulation unrelated to core concepts	(6.2.5.2)	(6.2.5.2)
Regulation related to core concepts	(6.2.5.3)	D
Regulation based on changing the core concepts	E	F

Figure 6.16 Regulating actions (Mars case)

6.2.5.2 Regulation unrelated to the core concepts

The first regulating option we will discuss is reactive regulation that takes place unrelated to the core concepts. In that case, the brand regulator regulates the brander’s operations without explicitly using the core concepts as essential variables, but by using other norms. In case of Mars, these norms refer to the market research for instance, as new extensions or new customer targets are evaluated on the basis of norms that refer to economic potential of the articles. As the quotes below imply, the economic potential of products was the most important norm:

“The most important criterion by far is the economic potential of the article. Not only in terms of volume, but also in terms of cannibalisation on existing products.” And: “Personally I have my doubts about the Mars Egg, but hey, if the concept in itself is successful, why not ?”

Norms – other than core concepts – were not only used reactively, but also for proactive regulation. For instance, ‘the opinion of the customer’ was used as a norm for proactive regulation: consumers were asked to evaluate a particular extension before it was introduced. As one of the ex-

ecutives argued, when asked about the introduction of the Mars ice cream:

"What we wanted is to check if it (Mars ice cream) was an appropriate extension from a branding point of view. But what did we see? As long as the product delivers on the taste and as long as you stick with a certain price value ratio and particular ingredients, we have a lot of freedom in extending the brand. More than we thought actually. You can be as clear as you want in your own definition, it is the consumer who determines." And: "I do not have all the wisdom. Is a drink something for Mars? Let the consumer decide. If the consumer likes it, why not."

At Mars, these 'marketing' and 'consumer' norms- other than core concepts – were often used as dominant criteria for regulating the brander's operations. To understand this, we have to look into history; at the point where Mars decided to introduce more different articles under the brand name. The brand used to carry those products that were invented by the product development department of Mars.

"In the past the Mars bar of 60 grams was sacred. At the end of the eighties we discovered that the brand was bigger than the volume we generated. Research showed us that the brand is very big and has a high degree of awareness. At the same time we learned from research that there was a need of sophistication of the brand. At the same time of our analyses in 1987 Coca Cola introduced Coca Cola Light. That was a sort of example for us at the time. We experimented in our factories with flavour variants and ingredient variants. At that time we introduced the Almond, the ice creams, and Mars milk. We tied a lot of products to the brand."

Based on the strong awareness of the brand, it was supposed to be able to carry a lot of other kinds of products. These were introduced without defining the essence (core concepts) of the brand in advance. There were criteria that would guide the introduction of new products.

Brand regulation in the sense we have defined it – regulating the introduction of products and attraction of new customers on the basis of the boundaries drawn by core concepts of the brand – was not applied systematically. As the quotes above indicate, norms other than the core concepts played a more important role. However, besides applying these norms, there still was an understanding that the application of these as the only norm could be risky for the brand. In due time, the understanding grew that the introduction of new products or attraction of new customers should be guided by an understanding of the core of the brand. In-

ternally there were indeed restrictions applied to introduce particular products and preferences to introduce others, which were based on some understanding about what should be the core of the brand. Indeed, based on these norms, variety was 'produced'. However, these norms were not applied systematically across the departments and across time. As one of the executives argues:

'In the past, understanding of the brand was a matter of individual interpretation. One day somebody would argue that this was an appropriate line extension because even it didn't taste like Mars, it delivered energy and Mars is about energy. And another day somebody would say, well this doesn't deliver energy and it doesn't have those semi-nutritional characteristics of Mars, but it tastes like Mars so it is a Mars.'

As a result of this lack of clear determined core concepts – the lack of clear cut boundaries defining the brander's concept of the brand – it was hard to perform regulating actions, either by rejecting products because they did not fit the core of the brand or by adding new concepts so that such a fit would be possible in the end.

However, this vague and not systematic application of shared essential variables was felt as a problem. After having introduced the Mars Almond, the Mars Ice Cream and the Mars Milk the urgency was felt to more systematically define and apply criteria that could guide the introduction of new products and attraction of new customers from a perspective of the core concepts. A process was started to systematically define the essential variables of the brand Mars. The perceptions and associations the consumers had of the brand were the most important input for defining this Mars brand essence. To find these associations, Mars conducted research amongst consumers across a number of European countries:

As a result of these experiences with all these products we came to the point where we asked ourselves the question: what is the essence of our brand? We did some new equity research only asking a different question this time. In stead of asking "what products are possible under the Mars name?", we asked: "what is a Mars in your eyes ?" The next step we made is going back to our roots.

This research proved that the Mars 'taste' was central in the definition of the brand Mars in the eyes of the consumer. The research below shows that the Mars taste and caramel ingredients are the only ones that are rated 'very important':

Q15. Importance hierarchy - Total testing Mars Bar

Weighted Base: All testing bar

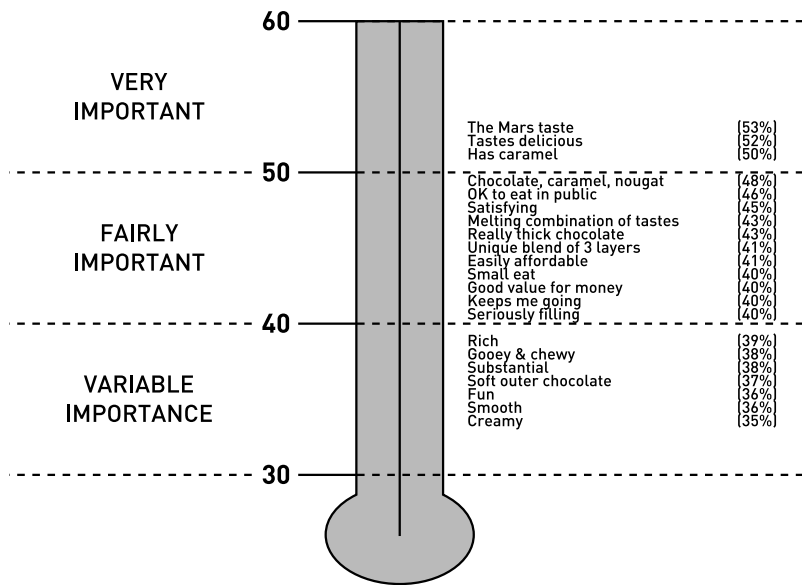


Figure 6.17 Research outcome

This research resulted in adapting the brand essence wheel (see figure 6.1.) and made a new brand document in which the and made the concept of 'taste' to play aplays a more dominant role again in the brand identity of Mars:

"Recent in-depth consumer research has confirmed the core equities of the brand are strong and derive directly from product experience. The brand wheel has been modified and a brand pyramid developed on the basis of this new understanding."

So, apart from the economic criteria, new criteria for brand regulation were defined by asking the opinion of the consumer. This lead to an adaptation of the brand identity by adding the concept taste. Mars also had other reasons to prefer the concept 'taste' and deny the concept of 'energy'. First of all, this had to do with the fact that executives feared that the brand would alienate people who are not sporty and energetic themselves. This we have seen in section 6.2.3.3.. The second reason has to do with the Mars brand portfolio. The concept 'energy' was closely linked to the brand Snickers. This brand was positioned as a 'hunger satisfyer', but

also obtained associations which had to do with 'energy':

"Snickers has been associated too much with sports and that brought it closer to the Mars brand. In addition Mars became more associated with bizarre sports like mountain biking and rafting."

After a process of intensive research and an assessment of internal motivations, Mars decided that 'taste' has to be a dominant value of the essential variable. However, as our research in the previous sections has shown, there still was confusion about the eventual core concepts of the brand among executives. Despite extensive research and the urge to define the essential variables, there was no consensus concerning these: the two versions of the brand identity remained intact. One of the possible explanations for this could be that the essential variables of the brand – the core concepts – were not considered the most important criterion for evaluating the introduction and positioning of articles. This will be elaborated further in the next section.

So, when it comes to the essential variables, we have learned the following:

- At first, the criteria which were used to judge the introduction of products and proposals to attract new customers were other – economic – criteria than the core concepts of the brand.
- Later on, there was an understanding of the importance of evaluating product and customers proposals by using criteria concerning the core of the brand. However, these criteria were not used systematically.
- These criteria were developed by using consumer research.

As a result, there were still two versions of the core concepts. In the next paragraph, we will see that these core concepts were used in the process of regulation after all, only in a reactive way.

6.2.5.3 Regulation related to the core concepts

Although there was some confusion about what the core concepts should be, they were used for regulation. Either 'taste and eating experience' or 'taste and energy' were used as criteria for regulation. When there was a proposal to link new products to the brand, it was evaluated whether these meet the taste and eating experience or energy qualities that were judged as being core to the brand. However, these core concepts were not used proactively to induce new products or target new customers. In-

stead, they were used reactively. As this quote of one of the executives shows:

"Criteria like 'does an article fit the brand' are things which have to be checked in the sense of 'it has to meet those criteria' then we can do it. They are checks during the process."

There were two moments when reactive regulation took place. The *first one* is described above. In the decision process of adding new products to the brand, the brand's core concepts were used as a criterion to either accept or reject the product. However, due to the ambivalence about the core concepts themselves, this kind of regulation was difficult. There was no clear focus on which products to reject and which to accept because there were two kinds of criteria. For instance, concerning the Mars Milk, two versions of the core concepts lead to two different potential regulating actions. On the one hand, Mars Milk did not get a good evaluation because it did not deliver on the promise of 'taste' and 'eating experience':

"Mars Milk, I have some concerns about. The taste is good. The milk is a quality product, is right. To me Mars is something to chew, but this is one of the things we are looking at."

On the other hand, Mars Milk was considered as a good extension by others who considered it a good example of 'taste' in combination with 'energy':

"Drinks are a fantastic extension. ...I think it fits very well with the brand. The fact that the milk is sweet definitely has a function here: it is the basis of the energy Mars delivers."

So, some executives – those who believed in 'taste' and 'eating experience' – considered rejecting the article Mars Milk because accepting it would threaten the essential variables (did not promise an eating experience). Others embraced it because it did not threaten the essential variables, it was considered a good extension because it delivered on the taste and energy aspects.

The *second* way of reactive regulation is to add new concepts to the products so that the article concepts are in line with the brand's core concepts. As illustrated in paragraph 6.2.4, different central distinctive subconcepts were added to the products. However, the addition of central distinctive subconcepts did not improve the link with the core concepts. Judged from these weak links between the articles and the core concepts, this kind of regulation did not work very well.

So, Mars did not perform regulating actions to the full extent. In the first place, regulation took place mainly unrelated to the core concepts. Secondly, if regulation took place in relation to the core concepts, this was only done reactively. Proactive regulation related to the core concepts was not performed. Moreover, in stead of a (reactive and proactive) change of core concepts, the Mars executives were constantly changing between two versions of the core concepts. As we will see in the next paragraph, because of this some weak spots in the conceptual structure could not be prevented.

6.2.6 Intermediate conclusion

In this section, we have investigated whether the proposed theoretical framework could improve the insight in the way the brand Mars deals with the dilemma of producing variety and preserving specificity. For that, we have conducted (a) a structural analysis of the brand concept and (b) investigated the history of regulating actions.

a). The structural analysis ought to provide insight in both the categorizing ability of the core concepts of the brand identity and the risk of specificity loss. With respect to the first, we so concluded that there were two versions of the core concepts. Both versions provided a feature frame of reference. The core concepts of the brand Mars provided two core features to the products linked to the brand. In one version, 'taste' and 'eating experience' were the features. In the other, 'taste' and 'energy' were considered as the key features. Viewed from its content, the two versions of the core concepts did differ with respect to their categorizing ability. The second version of the core concepts ('taste' and 'energy') had the ability to categorize a greater variety of products than the first version of the core concepts (taste and eating experience). However, we also concluded that the second version of the core concepts puts more restrictions on how people benefit by using these products: they get more energy. In this second version, the core concepts are more open to further categorizations based on product characteristics (formats, eating characteristics etc.). The first version of the core concepts (core concepts 'taste' and 'eating experience') puts fewer restrictions on how people could benefit from the products. The indicate product properties, which can be related to a variety of different benefits (like energy, indulgence, refreshment, etc.). Stated differently, they are more open to new categorizations based on new benefits.

With respect to the second aspect – the risk of the brand losing specificity – the structural analysis has shown that both versions do not differ with respect to the danger of losing specificity. In both cases, the danger was ‘under control’. The first reason to conclude this was that the relation between the core concepts was evident. This, at least was clear in case of the first version of the core concepts: ‘taste’ and ‘eating experience’ were conceptually related. The second reason for this was that all articles (both in case of the first as well in case of the second version of the core concepts) shared one core concept: ‘taste’. At least, all articles that were linked to the Mars brand, were supposed to share the same taste. This concept provided a basis for a variety of different formats, and kind of products (candy bar, egg, drink). Apparently, while the products might have been different from the outside, they had to be the same on the inside.

Still, we were able to identify some weak spots in the conceptual structure of both versions. Although one core concept (taste) was shared by all articles in both versions, the other core concept (‘eating experience’ respectively ‘energy’) was weakly linked to some article concepts in both versions. In both versions, five of the nine articles shared both core concepts. In the first version, one article was linked with the core concept ‘eating experience’ by a transformation link and three articles were linked to it by a contradiction link. In the second version, two articles were linked to the core concept ‘energy’ by a transformation link and two were linked to it by a contradiction link. Despite these weaker links, both versions of the core concepts had a network of articles that is closely linked to the core concepts.

b) When it comes to the regulating abilities of the brander Mars, the investigation of the history of regulating actions indicated that these abilities could be improved in order to deal with the threat of the brand losing specificity. The regulating actions performed by the Mars executives were limited in three aspects.

First of all there was confusion about what should be the core concepts. As a result, proper regulation was difficult. Both in terms of adding or rejecting new products or customers to the brand and in adding new concepts to the products in order to improve the link with the core concepts, the regulating actions were taken on the basis of two versions of the core concepts. This caused confusion which did not attribute positively to the construction of a clear conceptual structure.

Secondly, regulation on the basis of core concepts did not take place

systematically. The core concepts were not given a too important status in the process of regulation. Besides criteria like market share, especially the customer's opinion was applied as a dominant criterion in the process of regulation. The decision to introduce particular products or target a particular customer were evaluated by asking the customer. The use of the customer's opinion as key criterion in the process of brand regulation took place both reactively – the customer's evaluation was asked after the product was introduced – and proactively – the customer's evaluation was asked before a product was introduced.

Thirdly, brand regulation took place related to the core concepts, but this happened in a reactive way. It was only checked afterwards whether new products or customers should be rejected or accepted by the brand's core concepts

Although some regulating actions were performed in close relation to the core concepts and although there was some understanding of weaker links within the conceptual structure of the brand, regulating actions did not result in stronger conceptual links. Although there was an intention to perform regulating actions, some of them were not put in practice because of a lack of consensus concerning the core concepts.

6.3 The brand 'Douwe Egberts' Coffee

6.3.1 Introduction

In 1753, a little shop in the little town Joure in the Netherlands, achieved local fame for blending coffee. It grew out to be the most well known coffee brand in Holland. Today, Douwe Egberts Nederland is part of the Sara Lee corporation and its biggest division. Except for the coffee brand Douwe Egberts, the name functions as an endorser for the tea brand Pickwick as well. Our case concerns an investigation of the coffee brand Douwe Egberts Coffee in the period from 1985-1993. It is in this period that the brand managed to remain market leader in the Dutch coffee category. Today, it still is with a market share percentage of 55 % (retail).

Unlike Mars executives, the executives of Douwe Egberts were unanimous about what the core concepts of the coffee brand Douwe Egberts should be. In section 6.3.2. we will describe these core concepts as well as the concepts existing at the level of the articles. In section 6.3.3., the cat-

egorizing abilities of these core concepts in terms of the variety, will be investigated by analysing both their form (the frame of reference they provide) and the content. In section 6.3.4., we will analyse the risk of losing specificity which is attached to the way these core concepts are related to the article concepts. In section 6.3.5., we will investigate the history of regulating actions performed by the brander. In section 6.3.5. finally, we will discuss some intermediate conclusions.

6.3.2 The elements within the conceptual structure of the coffee brand Douwe Egberts

6.3.2.1 Identity level

The core concepts

Unanimously respondents considered the following concepts as core concepts of the Douwe Egberts coffee brand: 'Togetherness and Care'.

"In our vision coffee plays a crucial role in all social contacts in Holland, whether at home or outside the home. Coffee is a binding agent, a means that brings people together. In the factory you have a lunch break, pour yourself a cup of coffee, roll a cigarette. Literally a situation: and then there is coffee. We call this the social function of coffee."

This social character of coffee – reflected by the core concept 'togetherness and care' is rooted in the history of the Douwe Egberts coffee brand:

"We have been aware of this for quite some time. It has always been like that and I have been here for 26 years now. We have called it Togetherness and Care when we had to communicate with our brothers and sisters in other countries. After that we started to use it internally to distance ourselves somewhat from that emotionally charged "cosiness". Another marketing manager answered: *"That (the core concepts, RV) is not fixed, it is rooted in a number of employees who have already been working here for 40 years."*

The history of these core concepts is closely related to the use of the product coffee and the values of the founder of the company:

"The central associations, the values of the brand, are closely related to the product coffee. This is due to the fact that DE has been market leader by far – and that already for several decades!!" And: *"It was partly reflected in the company, a family business with much care for the*

employees, but it was also a patriarchal system: "Work hard and shut up". But the family took good care of you; they didn't leave you out in the cold. It became clear when you were ill and couldn't work that well. Nevertheless the family would see to it that your wife still got a Christmas box, etc. But that is over now. I have lived to see the last bit of it".

In other words, the concepts 'togetherness and care' are the core concepts of the brand.

The peripheral supportive concepts

The peripheral supportive concepts in the conceptual structure of the brand Douwe Egberts play a role in supporting the core concepts of the brand. These concepts first of all have to do with the roots of the company:

"The Frisian, also called the coffee pouring woman. The cherished statutory location of the company is Joure. We don't produce coffee in Joure anymore (only tea and Moccona). But to this day we cherish Joure, up to and including in our stationery. It is a small piece in the mosaic of associations with the brand: rural, simple, but good quality."

Another source of peripheral supportive subconcepts is the vision of Douwe Egberts concerning coffee consumption

"Furthermore coffee has a boost function, closely related to that 'bring together' function. You drink a cup of coffee the moment you say: We've worked for two hours already, now it's time for a cup of coffee and then we can go on for another two hours. Mothers who, with the children at school, have to clean the house, need to do other things but first they have a moment for themselves, just to relax, to recharge the battery: the boost function of coffee. The third is the purely physical function of coffee: the fluid intake. And especially important in our region: hot fluid intake".

As this quote indicates, the peripheral supportive concepts of the brand Douwe Egberts are: the 'energy function of coffee drinking' and 'the function of taking warm liquid' and rural atmosphere of Friesland' reflected by the logo.

The figure below displays the conceptual structure of the brand Douwe Egberts at the level of the identity:

Douwe Egberts at level of brand identity	
Core concepts	'togetherness & care'
Peripheral supportive concepts	'energy function', 'function of drinking warm liquid' 'rural atmosphere of Friesland'

Figure 6.19 The brand identity concept of Douwe Egberts coffee

6.3.2.2 Article level

The categories of products linked to the Douwe Egberts brand

When it comes to the kind of product the articles belong to, it is quite simple. All articles connected to the brand Douwe Egberts are coffee products.. There are two special cases: Piazza and Piazza d’Oro can be considered as belonging to a seperate subcategory, espresso coffee. But, because these are still coffee products we will also designate them as coffee products.

The central distinctive subconcepts of the articles

The central distinctive subconcepts at the level of the articles are those subconcepts which are considered as the concepts that should differentiate the articles from competitors and the other articles of the brand (according to the brander). At the time of the research, there were ten articles attached to the brand name of Douwe Egberts. The most central concepts of these were considered to be the following⁸⁷:

Article	Central distinctive subconcept
Aroma Rood	'togetherness', 'care'
Rosta	'kick', 'power', 'rough'
Piazza	'italian', 'good quality espresso'
Piazza d'Oro	'italian', 'superior quality espresso'
Select	'care', 'be distinctive', 'control'
Excellent	'care', 'traditional', 'standing', 'class', 'superior quality'
Mocca Royal	'care', 'indulgence', 'good quality mocca coffee'
Boncafe	'care', 'harmony', 'mild'
Cafuego	'care', 'sensual', 'young'
Decafe	'care', 'real coffee taste', 'responsible', 'healthy'

Figure 6.20 The central distinctive subconcepts at the level of the articles

In this paragraph, we have identified the different concepts of the brand Douwe Egberts. In the next paragraph, we will investigate the categorizing ability of the core concepts 'togetherness and care' by analysing both the form – the frame of reference provided by these core concepts – and the content of these concepts.

6.3.3 The categorizing ability of the core concepts

6.3.3.1 The frame of reference provided by the core concepts

The core concepts of the brand Douwe Egberts 'togetherness & care' do not represent a category of products, nor are they 'features' of a product. They do not belong to the domain of products. As we described in the previous chapter, such core concepts as abstract concepts stem from a different domain. They can provide a metaphorical frame of reference. They are abstract concepts. This makes it possible to use them metaphorically. These abstract concepts 'togetherness and care' clearly refer to such a different domain. They stem from a domain of 'human relationships' and are attributed to the domain of products.

The products of the brand Douwe Egberts are a target domain. By metaphorical projection, the coffee products are understood in terms of

the source domain. Thus, the brand concept of Douwe Egberts constitutes the metaphor: 'Coffee means togetherness and care'. The product properties and functional features of the Douwe Egberts brand, like good quality ingredients (product properties) and the social bonding function/energy and warming function of drinking coffee (functional features), are related to the target domain, the domain of products (coffee).

As we also discussed in chapter 4, the source domain provides a concept to understand the product aspects in a particular way. In the case of Douwe Egberts, the metaphor is based on a correspondence between the abstract concept and the ritual of drinking coffee; i.e. the social bonding function of coffee. Drinking coffee has the function of bringing people together. This can be indicated by the quote we discussed in the previous paragraph:

"In our vision coffee plays a crucial role in all social contacts in Holland, whether at home or outside the home. Coffee is a binding agent, a means to bring people together. In the factory you have a lunch break, pour yourself a cup of coffee, roll a cigarette. Literally a situation: and then there is coffee. This is the social function of coffee."

The concepts 'togetherness and care' add a symbolic meaning to coffee: coffee as a symbol of 'togetherness' and 'care'. As such, the social bonding aspect of drinking coffee is highlighted. The fact that the core concepts 'togetherness' and 'care' provide a metaphorical frame of reference has consequences for the variety of products and customers which can be categorized by these concepts.

6.3.3.2 The categorization of products

The core concepts as a metaphorical frame of reference provide the opportunity to understand a variety of products in terms of something else. The core concepts 'togetherness' and 'care' make it possible to understand a variety of different kinds of products in terms of (and use them as symbols of) 'togetherness' and 'care'. The concepts are not attached to one category of products in particular.

The potential variety of products depends on the correspondence which can be established between the core concepts and products. The core concepts are open to all categories of products as long as they can share this correspondence with the core concepts. As described above, the correspondence underlying the metaphor 'coffee is togetherness and

care' is based on a cultural meaning of drinking coffee. This cultural meaning is recursively stabilized. The meaning of 'drinking coffee' goes beyond the need to drink. People in Holland drink coffee to 'come together'. It used to be a cultural habit. Based on this correspondence, the core concepts are open to those categories of products that can have a social bonding function or are used in a context of social bonding. This makes the core concepts allow a great variety of different kinds of products, like coffee, cookies, cake.

So, judged from the form of the core concepts – the fact that they provide a metaphorical frame of reference – the core concepts generate categorization rules which make it possible to generate new categories of products. They can be linked to the brand as far as they can be associated with a social bonding function. By doing so, all these products can become symbols of 'togetherness' and 'care'. Judged from the content of the core concepts, they are also extendable to non-food items, when they contribute to 'togetherness' and 'care'. Based on the content of the concepts, the brand is open to categories like cookies but also furniture or even cafes. However, as we will see, these were not taken into consideration by most executives.

6.3.3.3 The categorization of customers

The core concepts as metaphorical frame of reference are abstract concepts that are related to another domain than the product domain. Judged from the content of these, they are well able to categorize other 'things' than products, for instance situations or people. The concept 'care' can be related to a symbolic feature 'caring'. Based on this symbolic feature, particular kinds of situations can be categorized, i.e. situations of caring. Such a symbolic feature can also be used to categorize people, i.e. people who are attracted to caring situations or are caring in themselves.

The categorization of people by the symbolic feature 'caring' is affirmed by one of the executives, who argued that the former company owners used to be 'caring' for their employees:

"It was clear, even when you were sick and therefore couldn't work well, the family would see to it that your wife still got a Christmas box, etc."

The customers are not categorized by a preference for product features – like 'taste' in case of Mars – but by their caring attitude: the brand Douwe

Egberts is attractive to people who can identify with 'caring situations or people'. Thus, an abstract concept like 'care' can provide sharp categorization rules for categorizing particular kinds of customers.

However, internally this is seen as a restriction. The selection of customers following from such categorization is felt as narrowing down the possibilities of the brand:

"The danger (cosiness as route for development) lies in the fact that it is very mainstream. When we follow this route with the brand, we limit ourselves enormously. Verkade, for instance, is also very mainstream."

As the quote illustrates, executives at Douwe Egberts argue that categorization based on symbolic features narrows down the potential variety of customers who can be attracted to the brand. More specifically, it is assumed that the brand will not be able to attract other kinds of customers because the categorization specifies certain situations of people. It is assumed that customers who cannot identify with these 'social features' (like togetherness and care) will not be attracted to the brand.

The potential powerful aspect of the metaphorical frame of reference (choosing particular people or situations which do belong to the domain of the brand) is perceived as a weakness (because these boundaries draw lines which deter other kinds of people from being attracted to the brand).

So, the categorization abilities of the core concepts as a metaphorical frame of reference allow various categories of products to be categorized as long as their use can be of service in a social bonding function. From a conceptual point of view, it provides a basis for categorizing a far greater variety of products than coffee products alone. To understand why this was not the case – at the time of the research – we need to analyse the related actions performed by the brander Douwe Egberts (section 6.3.5). At the same time, the abstract concepts are felt as a restriction. The fact that they provide very clear boundaries for customer selection – again from a conceptual point of view – internally provokes a fear of excluding people from the brand.

6.3.4 The risk of losing specificity

The brand Douwe Egberts Coffee has ten articles linked to it. In this paragraph we will analyse whether adding new articles to and attracting new customers by the brand has led to a danger of specificity dilution. We will

do so by analysing the relationship between the article concepts and the core concepts. The stronger the links between the articles and the core concepts the less the danger that the brand will lose specificity.

In the previous chapter, we have distinguished four different kinds of links which can exist between the core concepts and the article concepts. These indicate the strength of the link between the core concepts and particular concepts of the articles, the central distinctive subconcepts. These links are respectively:

- instance links
- similarity links
- transformational links
- contradiction links

In the exhibit below we see that only in one case all core concepts exist as central distinctive subconcept of an article. This is in the case of Aroma Rood. In case of all the other articles, the core concepts are partially, or not found as central distinctive subconcept:

Article	Central distinctive subconcept
Aroma Rood	'togetherness', 'care'
Rosta	'kick', 'power', 'rough'
Piazza	'italian', 'good quality espresso'
Piazza d'Oro	'italian', 'superior quality espresso'
Select	'care', 'be distinctive', 'control'
Excellent	'care', 'traditional', 'standing', 'class', 'superior quality '
Mocca Royal	'care', 'indulgence', 'good quality mocca coffee'
Boncafe	'care', 'harmony', 'mild'
Cafuego	'care', 'passionate', 'sensual', 'young'
Decafe	'care', 'real coffee taste', 'responsible', 'healthy'

Figure 6.21 The central distinctive subconcepts at the level of the articles

This means that only Aroma Rood is linked to the core concepts by an instance link. Most articles are linked to the core concepts by transformational links. One article is related to the core concepts by a contradiction link. More specific:

- Instance links: Aroma Rood
- Transformational links: Select, Mocca Royal, Excellent, Boncafe, Decafe, Cafuego, Piazza, Piazza d’Oro
- Contradiction links: Rosta

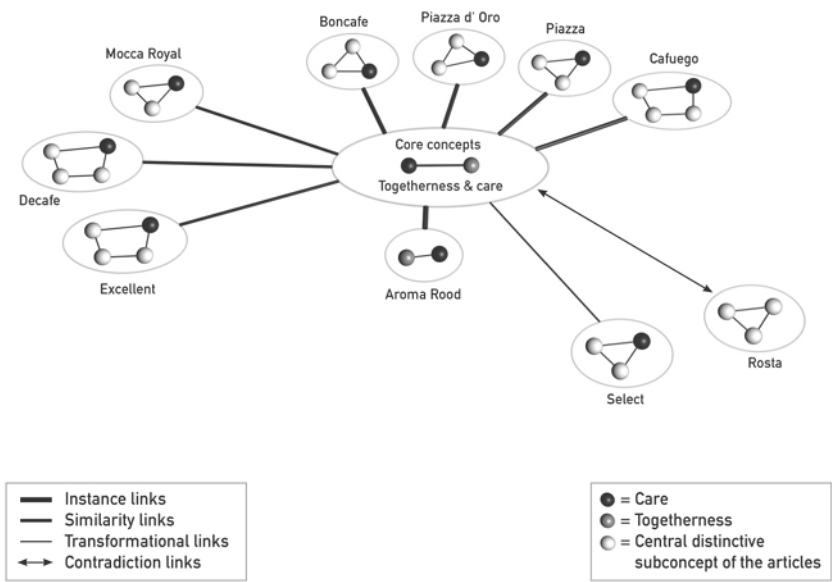
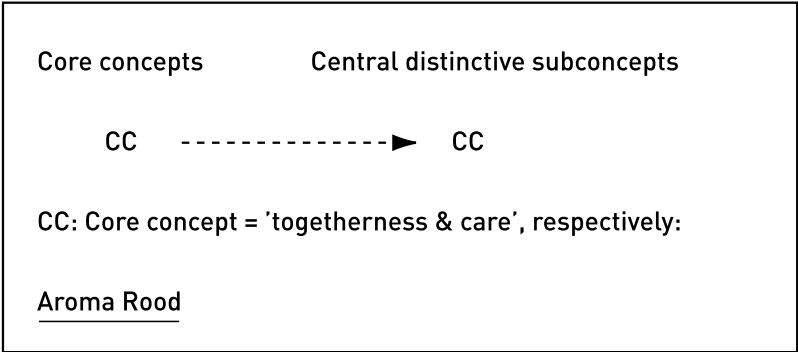


Figure 6.22 The links between the core concepts and the central distinctive sub-concepts of the articles

We will now discuss these links in greater depth.

Instance links: Aroma Rood

The relationship between the core concepts of the brand ‘togetherness & care’ and the central distinctive subconcepts of Aroma Rood, can be characterized by an instance link. That means: the core concepts are exactly the same as the central distinctive subconcepts of the article Aroma Rood. Schematically:



This strong relationship between Aroma Rood and the core concepts is confirmed by the fact that Aroma Rood is seen by the executives as the most representative of the articles of the Douwe Egberts family:

'Aroma Rood is still the basis of our assortment. It is a point of reference for all other products'.

All the other articles are linked more loosely to the core concepts. That means that they are all – except for one (Rosta) – linked to one core concept by transformational links. As exhibit 6.21 shows, Rosta is the only article concept that does not have the core concept 'care' as central distinctive subconcept. All the other articles have this concept as central distinctive subconcept. The other core concept 'togetherness' appears as a central distinctive subconcept only in a transformed way.

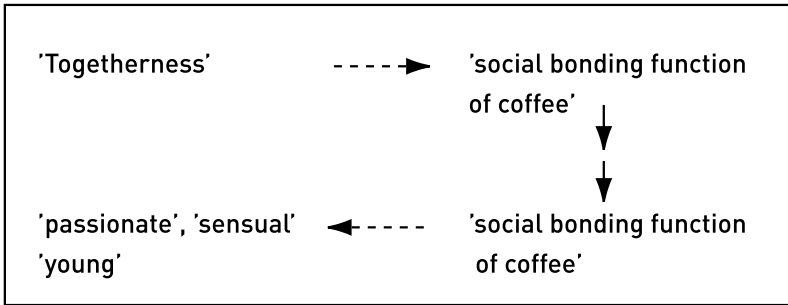
Transformational links: Select, Mocca Royal, Excellent, Boncafe, Decafe, Cafuego, Piazza, Piazza d'Oro

In case of transformational links, not all core concepts appear as central distinctive subconcepts of article concepts. However, the concepts that do not appear as central distinctive subconcepts are not contradictory to the core concepts. In the conceptual structure of Douwe Egberts, there are seven articles that have the concept 'care' as a central distinctive subconcept. The core concept 'togetherness' does not appear explicitly as a central distinctive subconcept, but appears in a transformed way:

Core concepts	Central distinctive subconcepts
CC	-----▶ CC.CDS
CC: Core concept = care	
CDS: Central distinctive subconcepts, respectively:	
<u>Mocca Royal</u> :	'care', in combination with 'indulgence', 'good quality mocca coffee'
<u>Excellent</u> :	'care', in combination with 'class', 'standing', 'superior quality'
<u>Select</u> :	'care', in combination with 'be distinctive', 'control'
<u>Boncafe</u> :	'care', in combination with 'harmony', 'mild'
<u>Decafe</u> :	'care', in combination with 'real coffee taste', 'responsible', 'healthy'
<u>Cafuego</u> :	'care', in combination with 'passionate', 'sensual', 'young'
<u>Piazza</u> :	'care', in combination with 'italian', 'good quality espresso'
<u>Piazza d'Oro</u> :	'care', in combination with 'italian', 'superior quality espresso'

In order to find the nature of this transformation, we have to look for some common scheme that connects the particular central distinctive subconcept with the core concepts. Such a common scheme can explain why the central distinctive subconcepts are still compatible with the core concepts. In all of the eight cases depicted in the table above, the central distinctive subconcepts are not contradictory to the core concept 'togetherness', yet are related to it in a transformed way. The principle that binds the core concept and the central distinctive subconcepts is based on the 'social bonding function of coffee'. It is the underlying principle by which both kinds of concepts are related to each other. All the central distinctive subconcepts of the articles in the table above are implicitly related to the core concept 'togetherness'. The core concept 'togetherness' is transformed in central distinctive subconcepts that are relevant for specific target audiences.

The central distinctive subconcepts of the article Cafuego for instance are related to the core concept 'togetherness' by the fact that the core concept 'togetherness' is transformed into a younger variant: the central distinctive subconcepts 'passionate', 'sensual', 'young':



In the case of Boncafe, the central distinctive subconcepts is 'harmony & mild' clearly transformations of the core concepts 'togetherness'. In the case of Mocca Royal, the core concept 'togetherness' is transformed into the central distinctive subconcepts 'indulgence with a good quality coffee'. As long as it is interpreted as indulgence that supports social bonding, the core concept is related to the central distinctive subconcepts with a transformational link. The central distinctive subconcepts of Excellent can also be interpreted as a more upper-class transformation of 'togetherness' characterized by the concepts 'class', 'standing' and 'superior quality'. At first sight, the core concepts of Select contradict with 'togetherness'. The central distinctive subconcept 'be distinctive' can be interpreted in an individual way: individuals who want to be distinctive. However, a further explanation of the concept shows that it should be interpreted in a more social way: people who drink Select belong to a select group of people⁸⁸. That interpretation 'drinking with a select group of people' can be seen as a transformation of 'togetherness'. The article Decafe has central distinctive subconcepts that are also transformed variants of 'togetherness'. They are positioned as a healthy, responsible way of drinking coffee together. The Italian coffees Piazza and Piazza d'Oro are conceptually linked to togetherness: their central distinctive subconcepts are related to the Italian way of drinking coffee; together, but in an Italian way.

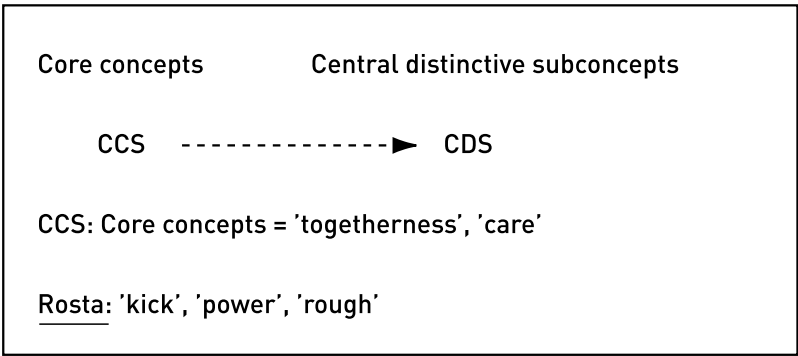
Like in the Mars case, we can conclude that the central distinctive subconcept that is linked to the core concept(s) by the transformation link, is a specification of that core concepts. The 'Italian way of drinking coffee', a

‘upper class way of drinking coffee’, ‘drinking coffee with a select group of people’; all of these are specifications of the core concept ‘togetherness’.

Contradiction links: Rosta

A contradiction link means that at least one of the central distinctive subconcepts of the articles is contradictory to the core concepts. In the case of Douwe Egberts, there only one article is linked to the core concepts by a contradiction link. This is the article Rosta.

Schematically:

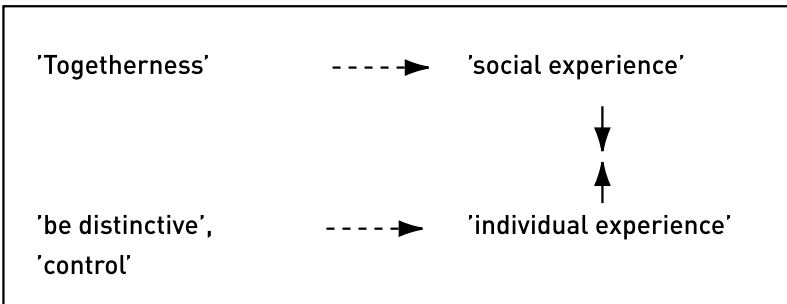


In case of Rosta, “togetherness” is contradictory to the central distinctive subconcepts because Rosta is positioned as a concept which reflects an individual experience. This is affirmed by one of the respondents:

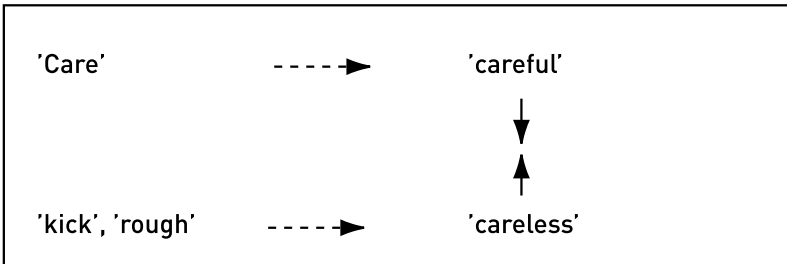
“Because of the individual components Rosta is furthest from the core of Douwe Egberts. Rosta represents individual experience which doesn’t tie in with ‘togetherness and care’ of Douwe Egberts. It is difficult to fit in Rosta. To Rosta togetherness and care are less applicable. Rosta is a more individual coffee. And that is exactly the problem we have with coffee. The more distinct flavours clash with the problem that coffee is a product that’s a compromise. Dictated by the fact that it is a social drink.”

This image of Rosta being based on individuality is proved by the commercials which were shown at the time. Within these commercials coffee drinking is related to individual moments, moments in which people choose to be alone. Schematically:

Rosta:



Rosta:



So, judged from the conceptual structure -as analysed above- of the brand Douwe Egberts, the specificity of the core concepts is not threatened. This can be concluded from the analysis of the relationship between the core concepts and the article concepts. Like some examples in the Mars case, the relationship between the articles and the core concepts is relatively strong – stronger than we might expect from a transformational link – because in almost all of the cases (one exception) at least one of the core concepts is represented by the central distinctive subconcepts: the core concept 'care'. One article concept has a very strong link to the core concepts, which is Aroma Rood linked by an instance link. Eight articles are linked to one of the core concepts ('togetherness') by a transformation link (Mocca Royal, Excellent, Select, Boncafe, Decafe, Cafuego, Piazza and Piazza d'Oro). But, because the core concept 'care' is still present as a central distinctive subconcept, this link is not weak. There is only one article related to the core concepts by a contradiction link. One of them has central distinctive subconcepts that only contradict with one core concept ('togetherness'). In the case of only one article ('Rosta'), the

central distinctive subconcepts contradict with both core concepts. These transformational and contradiction links suggest that the core concept ‘togetherness” is threatened to fade away to the background, because it not explicitly ‘reproduced’ at the level of the articles. However, the concept is secured within the conceptual structure of the brand, since it is part of the central distinctive subconcepts of the article Aroma Rood, which has a dominant position within it.

We will now discuss the history of regulating actions. This will provide insight a) in the regulating abilities of the brander itself, b) the backgrounds of the structural analysis and c) the relationship between the regulating abilities and the conceptual structure.

6.3.5 A history of regulating actions.

6.3.5.1 Introduction

The structural analysis of the previous section has shown that some articles are weakly linked to the core concepts. The question is how the weaker links could be created. It suggests that regulating actions failed or were not performed. Or, maybe it was not even considered as a problem. We will investigate these issues by analysing the history of regulating actions performed by the executives at Douwe Egberts.

As we discussed in the previous section (in the Mars case), there are six forms of regulating actions that can be performed. In contrast with Mars, the executives at Douwe Egberts performed regulating actions at all three levels:

In schema:

	Reactive	Proactive
Regulation unrelated to the core concepts	A (6.3.5.2)	B (6.3.5.2)
Regulation related to the core concepts	C (6.3.5.3)	D (6.3.5.3)
Regulation based on changing the core concepts	E (6.3.5.4)	F

The letters that are written in bold (A, B, C, and E) refer to the regulating actions as performed by the executives at Douwe Egberts. In the next three paragraphs (written in brackets), we will discuss these.

6.3.5.2 Regulation unrelated to the core concepts

The marketing of the brand Douwe Egberts taking place from 1985 resulted in all the articles which we discussed in the structural analysis. The core concepts did not explicitly play a role in the development of these products. At first, these regulating actions were performed reactively, in response to a concrete product proposal. Later, a model was constructed that made it possible to regulate proactively. So, after some incidental regulation attempts, a model was constructed for more structural regulation that made it possible to regulate in a proactive way. This is the so called cube model. We will discuss both the reactive and proactive form of regulation separately.

The reactive regulation unrelated to the core concepts took place in case of three articles: the repositioning of Rosta, Piazza and Decafe. These articles were repositioned, i.e. new concepts were added to them. The choice for these concepts was not guided by the core concepts, nor did they relate to a plan that stemmed from the time before the proposals were done. Instead, the choice of the concepts was a result of acute problems. Rosta was a result of a repositioning of a cheap label of Douwe Egberts into an article carrying specific concepts, like 'tough'. As the following quote illustrates, this article had a problem with its image; that's why new concepts had to be added to it:

'Rosta was the first subbrand of Douwe Egberts and clearly was a repositioning of Paarsmerk. That article had an image problem. It was known as a cheap coffee and of lesser quality. It threatened to become a changeling. That's why we positioned it as a stronger coffee with a kick function, totally different than the core of the brand at the time. It had a tough image. It didn't have trading stamps, unlike the other articles. This is because the article was targeted at a different group that was supposed not to be interested in these.'

The choice of the new concepts added to the brand article Rosta was guided by its product attributes:

'Rosta includes a relatively large share of robusta beans, which makes the coffee stronger. We said that it had to be communicated, so it

became 'the stronger coffee' in the mind of the consumer. .Later this was translated into 'tough'. We showed the commercial with this tough guy drinking coffee on his own.'

As the quote indicates, Rosta was repositioned because there was a problem with its predecessor (Paarsmerk). This problem at the level of an individual article was solved by adding concepts to an article from the perspective of solving that problem.

Another article which was also repositioned in reaction to an instant problem was Piazza. The existing product DE Espresso was repositioned in reaction to a particular problem. As one of the executives argued:

"At the time, Douwe Egberts had an espresso variant named DE Espresso. The combination of Fries and espresso was not considered as credible. So, we decided to give the product more an identity of its own, which would fit the specific 'espresso-segment'. DE Espresso was changed into Piazza. The brand name Douwe Egberts became an endorser, it was written in small letters on the package."

The only criterion used to guide the choice of concepts added to the article, was the assumptions of the executives about the way in which the customers perceive the category espresso coffee. The core concepts did not play a role.

The last article which had gained new concepts in reaction to particular problems related to the article itself is Decafe. In this case, also, other criteria than the core concepts were used to regulate the choice of concepts that should be added to the products. The choice of concepts was guided by the perceptions of the customer – as perceived by the executives of Douwe Egberts -. These were associations concerning the category of caffeine-free coffee. As one of the executives argued:

"We had the article 'Douwe Egberts Caffeinevrij'. The market for caffeine-free coffee was growing, so we wanted to get a good position. To achieve this, we concluded we had to build up more distinctiveness." And: "With Caffeinevrij, we solved two problems at the same time. The first problem was that it only attracted people who did not want caffeine, the second problem was that people thought caffeine-free coffee is not tasty. The positioning of Decafe grew to 'intense enjoyment'."

So, the product variant Decafe was regulated after introduction – unrelated to any core concepts – on the basis of perceptions of the customer.

Except for reactive regulation, a more proactive way of regulation was performed, after the repositioning of these articles. However, these regulating actions were still performed unrelated to the core concepts. For this purpose, a segmentation model was used. This segmentation model was used as a tool to relate the articles to each other. The background of the segmentation was that Douwe Egberts was a rather sales driven organisation until 1985. At that time the brand lost market share. It was attacked by private labels, which imitated its products and began to compete on price. The brand had become vulnerable, because it depended almost exclusively on Aroma Rood (Roodmerk at the time). There were three reasons to start with segmentation:

"In the first place a homogeneous market (as regards supply experience) is very sensitive to price competition. Price competition may lead to quality erosion and less product use. Secondly segmentation is necessary to realise profit growth in a market that is hardly growing. By adjusting the supply to certain segments you'll achieve more satisfaction of the consumer needs and consequently higher product appreciation (margin optimizing) and, more product loyalty. Finally an adequately segmented and covered market limits the opportunities for the competition."

The ultimate model used by Douwe Egberts was the so called cube-model (see figure 6.23):

"Later (round 1986) we developed the cube model to position other branded articles in a logical and consistent way. In particular it was an internal tool that was used to give branded articles a logical meaning and to set up a logical positioning."

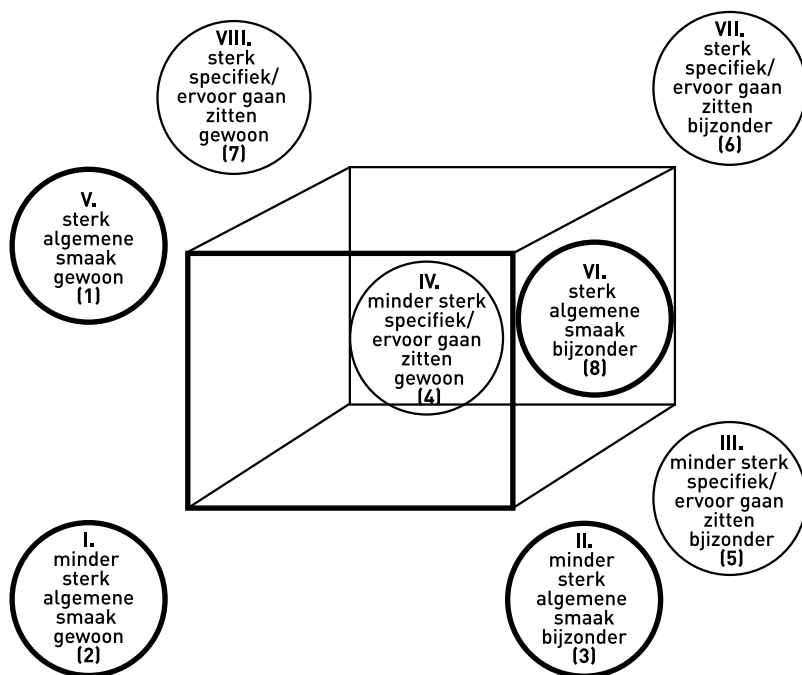


Figure 6.23 The cube model

"The cube model indicates that we can recognize three dimensions of coffee experience: the strength dimension (strong – mild), the activity dimension (drinking more cups of coffee with a general flavour versus sitting down to drink one cup of coffee with a specific flavour) and the evaluation dimension (regular versus special). As a result of these dimensions eight different "category clusters" have been constructed such as, for instance, the cluster 'less strong', 'general flavour and regular'. These clusters are used to construct the central distinctive sub concepts of the various branded article concepts. These central distinctive sub concepts are depicted as characteristics of coffee experience, neatly classified in relation to each other".

The cube model stimulated executives to perform regulating actions unrelated to the core concepts in a proactive way. Based on the model executives would plot opportunities on the basis of which not only the existing articles could be related to each other, but also new articles could be introduced.

This cube model did not provide essential variables for brand regulation in terms of core concept, i.e. central concepts that should be preserved. The criteria for regulation provided by the model caused the articles to develop individually, without the boundaries drawn by an overall concept. As a result, the ties between some article concepts and core concepts could become more loose. An exception to this was one article, Aroma Rood. As we saw in our structural analysis, most articles have specific concepts of their own. These concepts are extracted from the cube model, thereby reinforcing the 'conceptual autonomy' of the articles.

This 'conceptual autonomy', which was not regulated by core concepts, could threaten the essential variables. At some point in time, executives at Douwe Egberts recognized this and decided to change their regulating strategy. They became convinced they should use core concepts for regulation, so that the specificity of the brand could be maintained. The reasons for this and the strategy behind it will be discussed below.

6.3.5.3 Regulation related to the core concepts

The tensions between the identity concept and article concepts did not remain unnoticed by the marketeers of Sara Lee/Douwe Egberts. The executives realised that the article concepts were not compatible with the core concepts:

'Some identities (of the articles RV) contrasted with 'togetherness' and ' care '. That meant that we had a lot of trouble to match these with the core values of the brand.'

One attempt to reconcile the articles with the core concepts was made in 1990. This was done by making one core concept – in particular- important: the concept 'care'. This concept could be explicitly combined with the concepts of almost all other articles. As such, the relationship between the core concepts and the article concepts was restored. As this quote from a report illustrates:

"Starting point for the positioning of our products in the various parts of the world will always be the brand Douwe Egberts and its characteristic values. We will describe the Douwe Egberts 'family' from a central value: care. "Care is a value that can be interpreted by various family members with various nuances."

So, after most articles were re-positioned by having new concepts added to them, reactive regulation took place which was explicitly related to core concepts. By focusing on one core concept in particular -'care'-,

these articles were explicitly related to the core concepts. The result of this is illustrated by our structural analysis: the core concept 'care' is represented by the central distinctive subconcepts of 9 out of 10 articles.

So, there were attempts to perform reactive regulation related to the core concepts by linking all the articles to one core concept, the concept 'care'. This regulating action actually aimed to create one explicit link between the core concepts and article concepts. Another regulating strategy that was invented, but never performed, was to restore the link between the article concepts and *both* core concepts, i.e. 'togetherness' and 'care'. The idea was to change the central distinctive subconcepts of the articles into functional benefits, like: mild, strong, regular, etc. according to one of the executives, these functional benefits could be easily linked to both core concepts 'togetherness' and 'care'. As one of the executives argued:

"Another scenario is to change the positioning of the products. The articles would have functional benefits only. If we do so, we could still use the core values 'togetherness' and 'care'."

The idea behind this strategy was that the articles referring to functional benefits could be linked to both core concepts⁸⁹. In this strategy, these core concepts should reflect a world of 'people being together and taking care of each other'. All articles could fit this 'world', they only added product-related benefits to it, like drinking mild coffee or drinking strong coffee. An article like Rosta would perfectly fit the core concepts 'togetherness and care' because it did not refer to a 'tough', 'individualistic' world of drinking coffee, but it would stand for 'strong' coffee. 'Strong coffee' would be compatible with both core concepts, 'togetherness' and 'care'.

So, the reactive regulating actions related to the core concepts contain an attempt to get the articles in line with the core concepts, without changing the core concepts. There were two strategies behind the reactive regulating actions. Both strategies were based on the assumption that the central distinctive subconcepts of the articles – which were a result of the regulation on the basis of the cube model (see previous paragraph) – were not compatible with one core concept in particular, the concept 'togetherness'. The first strategy was an attempt to get the articles in line with one core concept in particular, i.e. the concept 'care'. The other strategy included the change of the central distinctive subconcepts of the articles, so that they would match with both the concept 'care' and 'togetherness'. As we also learned from our structural analysis, the first strategy won, because it reconciled two strategies in one. On the one hand it allowed the

central distinctive subconcepts of the articles – which were based on the cube model – to be maintained. On the other hand it restored the links between the article concepts and one of the core concepts, i.e. care.

Although executives at Douwe Egberts tried to perform proactive regulation related to the core concepts, they never actually came to it. Executives imagined what kind of products would fit the brand. This took place on the basis of the core concepts ‘togetherness’ and ‘care’. As the quote below proves, these core concepts were also used for planning new products:

“On the one hand start activities based on ‘cosiness’. This means that we can produce ‘cosy’ chocolate, cookies, cakes, lemonade, etc. We are already working on producing such cookies.”

The quote illustrates that the Douwe Egberts executives had ambitious plans to introduce new products on the basis of the core concepts. However, it stayed with plans. Although the other ways of regulation were really put into practice, proactive regulation was more a mind game than pure reality at the time.

6.3.5.4 Regulation based on changing the core concepts

At the beginning of this paragraph, we argued that the executives at Douwe Egberts became aware of the fact that the specificity of the brand could be endangered because of a lack of regulation on the basis of core concepts. The first answer to this concern was to perform reactive regulating actions as presented above. The second answer was to perform regulating actions while changing the core concepts themselves. This will be discussed now.

Being aware of some weak linkages between the articles and the core concepts ‘togetherness, and ‘care’, the executives at Douwe Egberts proposed to change the core concepts. This change of core concepts was suggested in reaction to concrete product proposals. Or even in reaction to articles which had already been introduced and turned out to be not that compatible with the core concepts. Instead of sticking to the concepts ‘togetherness’ and ‘care’ as essential variable, a new core concept was proposed: ‘coffee expertise’. The following comments illustrate this:

“The alternative core value we invented and which fits with Douwe Egberts was coffee expertise or craftsmanship.” And: “The central vision would be: we are experts in coffee, we know everything about coffee, and

that is why we know what a social coffee is, what a hedonistic coffee is, what functional coffee is. These are all possible variations which matches this central vision."

From a conceptual point of view, this core concept allowed the brand to extend towards other products:

"On the other hand we can embroider away under the denominator "coffee expertise". And that's what we are already doing. Liquid coffee, iced coffee." And: "Other products would be coffee lemonade, coffee cookies, coffee bonbons. In this case, we go to other markets, from the perspective of a coffee specialist. Starbucks does so in the USA. That is only possible once you have authority in coffee."

As these quotes indicate, this new concept 'coffee expertise' was considered as a concept which was able to draw boundaries which are broad enough to introduce all sorts of new products. At the same time, it enables the brand to improve the links to all existing articles, with the maintenance of the existing central distinctive subconcepts. The core concept 'coffee expertise' was very flexible. It can carry the different subconcepts of the articles, from coffee cookies to liquid coffee. This is illustrated by one of the executives:

"The core value is 'care' but translated in a particular way: expertise. The core value coffee expertise can carry all the identities of the different products. for Select this could be 'safety and secure' for Decafe 'healthy' for Boncafe 'hedo' in the case of Rosta 'kick' etc.. Everything is possible under the flag of 'coffee expertise'."

However, there was a disadvantage attached to the concept 'coffee expertise'. Although the executive suggests that this new concept 'coffee expertise' is closely linked to the original core concept 'care', both concepts are very different. The original core concept 'care' reflects 'care' for people, as we described in paragraph 6.3.2.1.. The new core concept -coffee expertise- is vaguely related to a different kind of 'care', which is care for products. The interpretation of care as 'expertise' relates to Douwe Egberts as a manufacturer, while originally the concept was related to the people using the coffee. So the brand is changed to a large extent when such a concept is chosen. This was the reason why this concept was not accepted by Douwe Egberts in the end. The executives stayed loyal to core concepts 'togetherness' and 'care' for different reasons:

"The concept 'coffee expertise' was not accepted. Marketers believed that 'togetherness' and 'care' were the core values of Douwe Egberts. They did not want to choose 'coffee expertise' because 'togetherness' and 'care' were considered to be too important values'." And: "Eventually, we choose for 'togetherness' and 'care', because we were used to these two'." And: "That was the Aroma Rood feeling. We did that for years, we had experience with it and had put a lot of money in. The discussion was emotional. 'Logical' arguments did not count, but what people had got used to."

So, in this section we have seen that the executives at Douwe Egberts performed regulation while changing the values of the essential variables or at least attempted to do so. This strategy resulted in proposals for introducing a new core concept, coffee expertise. Although it was a flexible concept which could link both the existing articles and new articles and customers, it was not a very specific concept. Even so, it was quite different from the core concepts "togetherness and care". This was one of the main reasons why it was not accepted in the end by the executives.

All in all, we can say that the regulating actions performed by the Douwe Egberts executives were sophisticated in the sense that they performed regulating actions at all three levels: unrelated, related and changing core concepts. Not all regulating actions, however, were always compatible with each other. In the next paragraph we will discuss this issue in greater depth.

6.3.6 Intermediate conclusion Douwe Egberts

In this section, the brand Douwe Egberts has been investigated by analysing both a) the conceptual structure of the brand (structural analysis) and b) the regulating abilities of the brander.

a). The analysis of the conceptual structure of the brand Douwe Egberts refers to researching the categorizing ability in terms of the variety that can be categorized by the brand and the risk of specificity loss. Our analysis illustrated that the core concepts of the brand had the form of a metaphorical frame of reference. The core concepts presented features belonging to a source domain that have a potential to categorize a variety of different categories of products. The core concepts 'togetherness' and 'care' belong to a different domain than the domain of products. By

metaphoric projection, different products – other than coffee – could be linked conceptually to the brand. Products like, coffee cookies or cake could be linked to the brand because they could play a role in the context of people coming together. Judged from the content of these concepts, even a chair would have been a possible product. However, this potential variety was restricted to food products as far as the executives were concerned. When it came to the categorization of customers, the symbolic feature ‘caring’ related to the source domain described a human trait and thus provided a clear categorization rule for categorizing customers.

The structural analysis of the risk of specificity loss showed that there was not a very great danger of the brand losing specificity. Although the concept ‘togetherness’ did not exist at the level of *all* articles, the core concept ‘care’ was present as central distinctive subconcept of all the articles, except one: Rosta. The other core concept ‘togetherness’ was threatened to fade away to the background because it was in most of the cases (8 of the 10 articles) related to the articles only in a transformed way. In these cases, the central distinctive subconcepts of the articles were specifications of the core concept ‘togetherness’. One article in particular was related very strongly to the core concepts. This was the article Aroma Rood. The article Aroma Rood stood for both the core concepts ‘togetherness’ and ‘care’. It was its dominant position that could prevent the concept ‘togetherness’ to fade away to the background. However, with respect to the relation between the core concepts, we found a discrepancy. The interpretation of the core concept ‘taste’ did not match with the interpretation of ‘togetherness’ sometimes. At one stage of the development of the brand, the core concept ‘care’ was interpreted as ‘care for product’, which is less compatible with the concept ‘togetherness’ than the interpretation of ‘care for people’.

b). The existence of weaker links between the articles and the core concepts and the weak position of the concept ‘togetherness’ presumes that brand regulation was performed only in a restrictive way. Yet, regulating actions were performed at all three levels in the matrix.

First of all, they were performed without being affected by the core concepts. Reactive regulation resulted in concepts being added to the articles under the influence of acute problems and guided by customer’s perceptions of a category. Proactive regulation led to the development of the cube model. It did not offer a basis for proper regulation because it did not relate actions of the brander to a certain normative brand concept. Instead, it provided some kind of description of the way in which the arti-

cles should relate to each other. Although it provided a basis for regulation, the consequential regulating actions did not explicitly contribute to the preservation of the brander system because it did not stimulate regulation related to the core concepts. However, the application of this cube model stimulated the awareness that brand regulation -regulation in relationship to the core concepts -was important somehow.

The *second* level of regulating actions represented actions that were performed in close relationship with the core concepts. These regulating actions which were related to the core concepts were used mainly in a reactive way, after products had been introduced. In reaction to an understanding of some weak spots within the conceptual structure of the brand, regulating actions were performed by changing the concepts at the level of the articles. So, that these articles would not only match with the core concept 'care', but also with the concept 'togetherness'. This proposal was rejected because the changed central distinctive subconcepts did not match with the central distinctive subconcepts based on the cube model. The second proposal was to reinforce the link between the core concept 'care' and the rest of the articles. That solution was accepted. Proactive regulation was not really carried out.

Thirdly, there were also regulating actions performed by trying to change the core concepts. Again, these were performed reactively; in reaction to 'weak spots' in the conceptual structure that were created after the introduction of products. It was proposed to change the core concepts into 'coffee expertise'. Although this concept was very flexible -it makes did not connect with the previous core concepts, 'togetherness' and 'care'. Because most executives were still in favour of these core concepts, the proposal to change them was rejected by the Douwe Egberts executives.

So, unlike the Mars executives, the Douwe Egberts executives really managed to restore weak links of the conceptual structure by reactive regulation. However, there was little proactive regulation and the actions at the three levels were not very well related to each other. One of the proposals at the second level (a change of concepts of the articles into functional benefits) did not match the strategy at the first level (concepts resulting from the cube model). The proposal at the third level (the new core concept 'coffee expertise') did not match the strategy at the second level (the core concepts 'togetherness' and 'care'). This leads to the conclusion that although a whole range of regulating actions were performed, they were executed on a rather ad hoc basis.

6.4 The brand Camel Trophy

6.4.1 Introduction: history of the Camel Trophy

The last subject of our cases is the brand Camel Trophy. Camel Trophy as a brand is not to be confused with the cigarette brand Camel. Although both have tight historic relationships and are related conceptually, they are separate brands, with separate names and articles attached to them. Camel Trophy started out in 1980 as a cigarette promotion for the cigarette brand Camel, but evolved to having an organisationally and conceptually separate status:

"The Camel Trophy started in 1980. Originally as a cigarette promotion in Germany. It was an initiative from the local German marketing organisation: they thought it could be useful for their cigarette brand. Three years later they decided: we should separate the CT from the Camel cigarettes because since 1977 – so before the Camel Trophy – we have had clothing, shoes and bags in Germany called: Camel Collection and Camel Boots."

So, the brand Camel Trophy is created out of the cigarette brand Camel. The brand Camel Trophy was a way to exploit the brand Camel and leverage it to other product groups:

"The idea is brand diversification: we have a brand name to begin with: Camel. RJ Reynolds has the right to use the name Camel. They have existed for eighty years already. Of course they have invested in the brand, this brand has an image, an economical value, an asset. At a certain point they thought: hey, we can exploit it, we can do more with it. We have already invested so much and with relatively little extra money we can realise profit in other product groups such as clothing, shoes, watches and bags. And this can go on forever. In principle WBI and, that is why it has been established, owns the trademark rights for the brand Camel and Camel Trophy for all product categories except tobacco. We do everything that has Camel on it, except tobacco."

In this case study we will focus on the brand Camel Trophy which in itself is a brand that carries several products as we will see in the next paragraphs.

In paragraph 6.4.2., we will discuss the conceptual structure of the brand. In paragraph 6.4.3., the categorizing ability of the core concepts is investigated in terms of the variety these are able to categorize. In paragraph 6.4.4., the risk of the brand to lose its specificity will be analysed

and in paragraph 6.4.5., we will discuss the history of regulating actions. In paragraph 6.4.6. we will draw some conclusions.

6.4.2 The conceptual structure of the brand CamelTrophy

6.4.2.1 Identity level

Comparable with our analysis of the other cases, we will first of all give a plain description of all the concepts within the conceptual structure of the brand. In the next paragraph, these concepts will be analysed.

The core concepts

The core concepts of the brand Camel Trophy are depicted in ‘the brand identity prism’ depicted below:

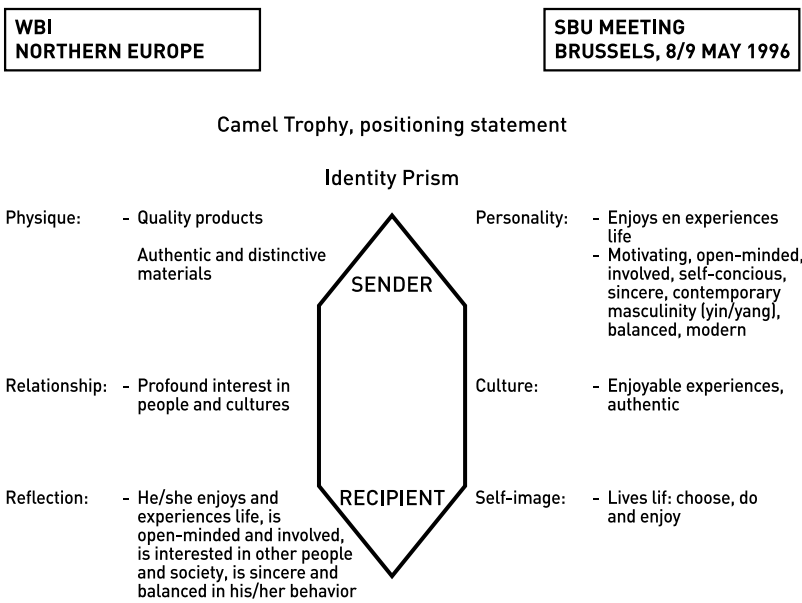


Figure 6.24 Brand identity prism Camel Trophy

When they were asked, the executives unanimously answered that the core concepts were those concepts indicated in the brand identity prism by ‘self image’: ‘live life’: ‘choose’, ‘do and enjoy’. As the following quote illustrates:

"With the help of the brand identity prism of Kapferer we have indicated which route we have to follow. The real core of the brand is embodied by the self image: live life, choose, do and enjoy."

Since the core concepts of the brand are indicated as 'self image', a deeper insight in the notion of 'self image' is appropriate. In Kapferer's theory, the notion of 'self image' is explained in relation to another notion of his identity prism, 'reflection'. In his theory 'reflection' refers to the way ideal image of the target audience as communicated by the brand. As Kapferer explains: "Reflection is not necessarily the target, but the image of that target which the brand offers to the public (Kapferer, 1992: 47)." For instance, the reflection in case of Porsche, could be characterized as 'young', 'exciting' and 'sportive'. Self image on the other hand, refers to the way the target audience is seeing itself: "If reflection is the target's outward mirror, the self-image is the target's own internal mirror. Many Porsche owners, for instance, are simply proving to themselves that they have the ability to buy such a car. (Kapferer, 1992: 48)."

The core concepts of the Camel Trophy brand are an expression of the way the target audience of the brand sees itself. More in particular, it expresses a way of life in which enjoyable, authentic and social experiences play a crucial role. These core concepts are supported by the other peripheral concepts described in the identity prism.

The peripheral supportive subconcepts

The core concepts – indicated in the identity prism by the 'self image' – are supported by the other concepts indicated in the identity prism⁹⁰. The target audience's way of life expressed by the concepts 'live life, choose, do and enjoy' is supported by the ideal representation of the target (reflection) that is characterized as 'enjoying and experiencing life', 'open mindedness' and 'involved', 'interest in other people and society' and the fact that he or she is 'sincere' and 'balanced' in his or her behaviour. The core concepts are also supported by the fact that the brand's relationship⁹¹ is characterized as 'a profound interest in people and cultures' and the brand's culture of having 'enjoyable and authentic experiences'. Last but not least, the way of life expressed by the core concepts is supported by the brand's personality⁹²: he/she enjoys and experiences life, is motivating, open-minded and involved, self conscious and sincere, balanced and modern and embodies contemporary masculinity.

The way of life described by the core concepts on the one hand and the peripheral supportive subconcepts on the other constitute a unity. Al-

though the brand identity is described in lot of words, these are related strongly. The element of having experiences is dominant in the core concepts ('live life, do'). This is specified by peripheral supportive concepts: the brand's relationship reflects interest in others; the brand's reflection and the brand's personality show a comparable 'open mindedness'. The element of enjoyment is also central in the core concepts (and anjoy') and reflected by some of the other peripheral supportive subconcepts. The brand's culture for instance, refers to enjoyable experiences and the brand's reflection and personality both characterize this aspect of the brand as 'enjoyable experiences'.

6.4.2.2 Article level

The category of products linked to Camel Trophy

There are four kinds of articles attached to the Camel Trophy brand:

- Camel Trophy Adventure Wear
- Camel Trophy Adventure Boots
- Camel Trophy Adventure Watches
- Camel Trophy Adventure Bags

The category of products these articles are part of are respectively, clothing, boots, watches and bags.

The central distinctive subconcepts of Camel Trophy

As the identity prism in figure 6.24 shows, the 'physique' in the brand identity prism – the concepts 'quality products, authentic and distinctive materials' – belong to the level of the article concepts. So, the central distinctive subconcepts of the Camel Trophy brand are: 'Quality, authentic, distinctive materials'

These apply for all the articles linked to the Camel Trophy brand. That means that the central distinctive subconcepts for all the article concepts are all the same.

So, in these last two paragraphs, we have described the brand identity and the most important subconcepts of the articles of the Camel Trophy brand. At first look, the conceptual structure of the Camel Trophy brand is characterized by 'symmetry'. The brand identity consists of various subconcepts that form a unity. The central distinctive subconcepts are the same for all the articles. In the next two paragraphs, we see what this means for the categorizing ability of the core concepts and the risk that it loses specificity.

6.4.3 The categorizing ability of the core concepts

Knowing that 'Live life, choose, do and enjoy' are the core concepts of the Camel Trophy brand, we will discuss the categorizing abilities of these. We will do so by investigating both the form and content of these concepts.

6.4.3.1 The frame of reference provided by the core concepts

The brand Camel Trophy cannot be understood without discussing its relation with the Camel Trophy event. As we discussed in our introduction, The Camel Trophy was an event originally used for the promotion of the cigarette brand Camel. Created out of a promotional tool, 'Camel Trophy' was more and more managed as a brand in itself. Generalized concepts were explicitly linked to 'Camel Trophy'. These concepts were closely related to the characteristics of the Camel Trophy event. During a long process of communication, the name Camel Trophy was related to these generalized concepts. It became a symbol referring to these concepts and related to the event.

This meant first of all that changes were made to the event on the basis of a desired change in the core concepts⁹³. To keep the brand attractive to the target group, the concepts had to change and with that, the event had to change. The change of the event was an instrument to make clear to the target group that the brand had changed somewhat. As one of the executives argued:

"If we change the brand identity of Camel Trophy, the Trophy itself will change. In the past the image of the Trophy was long rows of cars driving behind each other. Now we try to incorporate more spontaneity and own initiative. More 'initiative within a group'. You can choose your own route as long as you are back at a fixed point within three days."

Secondly, the application of 'brand management' of Camel Trophy led to the relation of new articles to the Camel Trophy brand. The brand became not only associated with an event, but also with articles like clothing, boots, watches. Like any other brand, the brand Camel Trophy was a unity of concepts related to articles:

"Our most important starting point is: Camel Trophy as an event is the key promotion tool for the products. To our present consumers the Trophy should be relevant in values, needs and wants."

The question is, then, what kind of frame of reference the core concepts provide to the articles. In the conceptual structure of the Camel Trophy brand, the brand identity, the event and the article concepts are related in a certain way. The core concepts do not represent a category of products, nor do they concern a set of product features. The core concepts of Camel Trophy provide a metaphorical frame of reference. They are concepts belonging to a different domain than the domain of the products. The domain stands for a way of life (in which enjoyable, authentic and social experiences play a crucial role), which is reflected by the event. The event in itself is a symbol of such enjoyable, authentic and social experiences and thus, can be seen as an expression of this domain.

So, the conceptual structure of the Camel Trophy brand is characterized by core concepts, which are related to a 'domain of experiences'. The articles of the Camel Trophy brand are related to a different domain, the 'domain of products'. The relationship between the core concepts of the Camel Trophy brand and the articles is metaphorical because the first belong to a different domain than the second. The domain of experiences the core concepts are related to, are a source domain, while the articles belong to a target domain of products. By metaphorical projection, these products are understood in terms of the source domain and they can become metaphorical. Clothing, boots, watches and bags become expressions of a life of enjoyable, authentic and social experiences.

As we have seen also in the Douwe Egberts case, a metaphorical frame of reference is based on establishing a correspondence between the core concepts and the products. As we saw in the previous paragraph, the product aspects that characterize the articles of Camel Trophy are quality, authenticity and distinctive materials. These aspects are the central distinctive subconcepts of the article concepts. One could argue that – based on these aspects – the products are tailored to be used during enjoyable, authentic and social experiences. They not only should have the capacity to be worn in difficult circumstances, which means that they should have good quality. They could also be a symbol of these experiences because they have authentic and distinctive materials. In this way, the products are used metaphorically to express a certain way of life indicated by the core concepts. Thus, these core concepts constitute the metaphor: 'These authentic and distinctive clothing, boots, watches and bags of high quality stand for a life of enjoyable, authentic and social experiences'. By wearing them, one can express that he or she prefers these experiences or even indicate that he or she has engaged in them. As a result of this

metaphorical projection, particular aspects – the fact that they have good quality, are authentic and distinctive – are highlighted.

In the next two paragraphs, we will discuss the consequences of this in terms of the ability of the core concepts to categorize products and customers.

6.4.3.2 The categorization of products

The question we are addressing in this paragraph refers to the variety of products that can be linked to the core concepts of the brand. In other words, to which kind of products are the core concepts open, and to which are they not? As we will argue, both the generalized concepts and the event can provide a conceptual link for the introduction of new products. We will discuss these two possibilities separately.

For the assessment of the ability of the generalized concepts to link new products to the brand, we can analyse both the content and form of these concepts. Judged from its content, the core concepts 'Live life, choose, do and enjoy' are not related to specific products in particular. This means there is a great variety of possible products that can be linked to those concepts. Generalized from a specific event, they can become general as well. The content of these concepts refers to a description of a very general way of life. It is via the link with the peripheral supportive subconcepts that these concepts get more 'depth' and can provide more direction as to which products could be linked to the brand ideally. To assess the variety of products, we must analyse the way these core concepts are related to other concepts within its conceptual structure.

The core concepts provide a metaphorical frame of reference. The variety provided by the categorization rules of 'abstract' concepts depends on the ability to find some correspondence between product aspects and these abstract concepts. The core concepts are open to all categories of products as long as they share this correspondence with these core concepts. The correspondence between the core concepts and the products is provided by the peripheral supportive subconcepts. The correspondence between on the one hand the Camel Trophy products and on the other hand the way of life expressed by the core concepts (live life, choose, do and enjoy) is based on the fact that these products are made for experiences that belong to such a way of life: enjoyable, authentic and social experiences. These 'enjoyable, authentic and social experiences' are concepts provided by the peripheral supportive subconcepts. As we analysed

in paragraph 6.4.2.1., the culture, reflection, relationship and personality in the brand identity prism refer to these kinds of experiences. These supportive subconcepts provide the correspondence between the abstract way of life – indicated by the core concepts – and the concrete products that are an expression of this way of life. The products have features that make them very appropriate for being worn during these experiences. These products have such a good quality that they can be used for the most intense enjoyable experiences. The products also have authentic and distinctive qualities that can be used to express the authentic nature of these experiences. This means that the core concepts are open to a variety of (kinds of) products that have the quality, authentic and distinctive features that are needed in the context of enjoyable, authentic and social experiences. These can be all sorts of clothing, but also food, vehicles or services like holidays.

So, the variety of products that can be categorized by the core concepts is based first of all on the core concepts and the peripheral supportive subconcepts. The latter ones can function as a 'liaison' between the products and the core concepts, both belonging to different domains. Thus, they provide a context (the context of enjoyable and authentic experiences) that can help to link new products to the brand. Secondly, the event itself can provide such a context. As the quote below illustrates:

"The bags were the latest introduction in Holland, some two or three years ago. Undoubtedly the motive was: we have clothing, we have shoes, and we have watches: what else have we got? Think of this: when you go to the Trophy, what do you take with you? You take your bag with you."

As these comments illustrate, new products can be categorized on the basis of the relevance of these products within the setting of the event. Since the event is an exemplary realisation of the core concepts, it can provide a specific context for the introduction of new products so that these products can become excellent substantiations of the core concepts again. Like the peripheral supportive subconcepts, it seems that the event can add specific 'direction' to the more general way of life indicated by the core concepts and thus, provide a more specific context for linking new products to the brand.

6.4.3.3 The categorization of customers

Although the core concepts of Camel Trophy are closely related to the event Camel Trophy, the brand must, of course, not appeal only to potential participants of the event. The communication efforts are not only focused on potential participants of the event. The brand Camel Trophy must create awareness and loyalty among people who are attracted by the way of life it stands for. As one of the executives argues:

"To me it is not a matter of how many people sign up for the Trophy, entries enough. What really matters is that the image and the brand become more accessible. That people think: I want to be part of it, it seems interesting to me. Or the other way around: if the commercial doesn't work for me, that that watch won't do it for me either."

For the categorization of customers, the core concepts provide a clear direction because they are explicitly created for the categorization of a specific kind of customer. As figure 6.24 shows, the core concepts are characterized in the identity prism as 'self image'. This indicates the way the Camel Trophy customer is thinking of itself. These core concepts provide a clear categorization of customers which is based on attracting people who can identify with (people who live) the way of life expressed by these core concepts. However, like the categorization of products, the supportive subconcepts provide a further specification of the core concepts, which gives even more direction for the categorization of customers. The element in the identity prism called 'reflection' offers concepts which represent human traits that are designed to categorize customers as well. They concern an ideal representation of the customer as put forward by the brand and enable a more specific categorization of customers. Based on the concepts characterized as 'reflection', the brand is open to those customers who are attracted to or can identify with the ideal of an open minded, involved, sincere and balanced person who enjoys life and is interested in other people and society.

So, in the Douwe Egberts case we have seen that the core concepts could be translated into a symbolic feature 'caring' which made it possible to create categorizations of customers who could identify with this feature. Here, we see that the core concepts are explicitly used for the categorization of customers (it is indicated as 'self image') and are related to a variety of concepts that indicate human traits that can also be used for the categorization of customers.

In the next section, we will analyse the conceptual structure to discov-

er the risk to the brand to lose specificity under the influence of the the introduction of new products.

6.4.4 The risk of losing specificity

The brand Camel Trophy has four articles linked to it. In this paragraph we will analyse whether the attachment of these articles has led to a danger of specificity dilution. We will do so by analysing the relationship between the core concepts and the central distinctive subconcepts.

As we discussed in section 6.4.2.2., the central distinctive subconcepts of the article concepts are the following: *'quality, authentic, distinctive materials'*. These concepts are shared by all article concepts. This means that the relationship between the article concepts and the core concepts is the same for all the articles. They are related to the core concepts by a similarity link. This is indicated by figure 6.25.

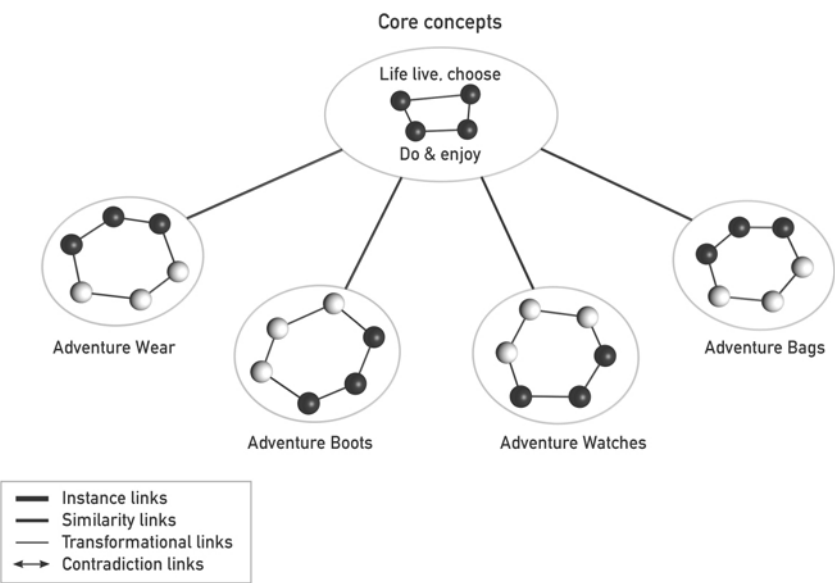
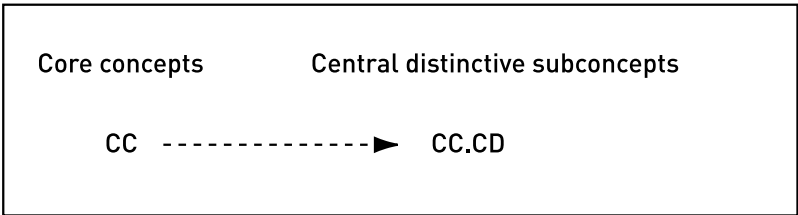


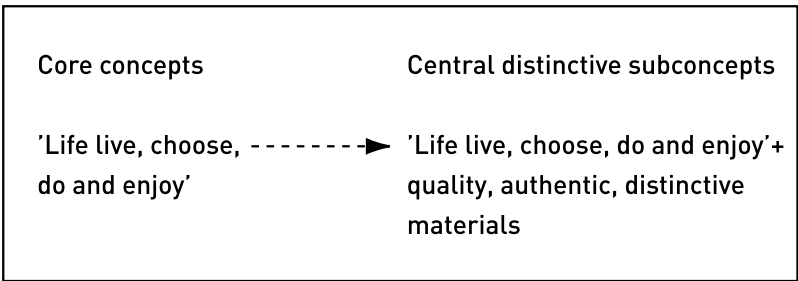
Figure 6.25 Relationship between the core concepts and central distinctive subconcepts of the articles defined by similarity links

The fact that the core concepts are linked to the central distinctive subconcepts by similarity links, means that the article concepts of the Camel Trophy brand consist of a combination of distinctive subconcepts of the article concepts and all the core concepts.

The article concepts contain both core concepts and central distinctive subconcepts of the articles alone:



For all articles (Camel Trophy Adventure Boots, Camel Trophy Adventure Clothing, Camel Trophy Adventure Watches, Camel Trophy Adventure Bags) this would give:



That means that the relationship between the article concepts and the core concepts is strong (they are related by similarity links) and balanced (all the articles are related to the core concepts in exactly the same way).

What does this particular conceptual structure tell us about the risk that the brand Camel Trophy loses specificity by the attachment of these new articles to that brand? As we have seen in the other cases, there are two potential causes for such a risk to lose specificity.

The first cause concerns a possible discrepancy between the core concepts of the brand. In this case, there is no such discrepancy whatsoever. The core concepts 'live Life, choose, do and enjoy' are not contradictory, they are complementary. Although the combination is quite abstract, there is no risk of the brand losing specificity as result of the presence of a possible discrepancy between the core concepts. They are supported by a variety of peripheral supportive subconcepts that form a consistent unity with these core concepts. Moreover, these peripheral supportive subconcepts give more 'depth' to the core concepts.

The second cause concerns the structural relationships between the core concepts and the central distinctive subconcepts of the article concepts. In this case, there is no danger of the core concepts losing specificity due to such a weak structural relationship. More in particular, the article concepts and core concepts are related to each other by similarity links, which is a strong link. Moreover, unlike the other two cases, *all* core concepts were shared by *all* article concepts.

Besides these two potential causes, a potential risk is also minimized by the fact that the Camel Trophy event functioned as a symbolic example of the Camel Trophy brand. As discussed above, the individual products were conceptually linked not only to the core concepts by a metaphorical frame of reference but by the fact they could be related to the context of the event as well. That means that the event fulfilled a role in establishing a separate link between the brand and its products and thus can be seen as another building block in the preservation of specificity.

So the danger that the core concepts might lose specificity can be judged as minimal.

6.4.5 A history of regulating actions

As we discussed in the previous cases, a brand regulator has different regulating options at his proposal. In the figure below, these are illustrated. In bold, the options are written which were used by the executives at Camel Trophy.

	Reactive	Proactive
Regulation unrelated to core concepts	A(6.4.5.1)	B(6.4.5.1)
Regulation related to core concepts	C	D(6.4.5.2)
Regulation based on changing core concepts	E	F(6.4.5.3)

All kinds of regulating actions were used by the brander, except for the reactive regulation with the use of core concepts. We first of all will discuss the regulation that took place unrelated to the core concepts (A & B). This will be done in paragraph 6.4.5.1. In paragraph 6.4.5.2. we will shortly discuss the regulation with the use of core concepts (D). In paragraph 6.4.5.3., we will discuss regulation and the adaptation or change of the core concepts (F).

6.4.5.1 Regulation unrelated to the core concepts

Regulation of the brander system took place mainly in close relation to the core concepts. However, other criteria of course also had a role in the process of regulation. As one of the executives argued:

"For all product groups, the main reason for introducing new products was that they would be profitable."

This criterion was not only used reactively but also proactively. Reactive regulation meant that each new product proposal was evaluated after introduction on their contribution to profits. Proactive regulation also took place: new products were judged by their profit potential. As one of the executives argued:

"The reason why we introduce particular products in countries is potential. The head offices in Cologne give a global indication of the products that can be introduced in the countries. The countries give input about the products they assume to become successful in that particular country."

As the quotes illustrate, one way of regulation was performed by assessing choices about products and customers by using economic criteria. However, unlike the Douwe Egberts and Mars brands, the manufacturing abilities of the organisation did not play a dominant role in regulating the choice for particular products or customers. The product characteristics were made subservient to the criteria related to the core concepts of the brand. This has to do with the fact that the products introduced under the brand name were not manufactured by other allied parties. WBI itself was not dependant on 'production targets' because it did not own a factory:

"WBI is licensee and in the first place we issue licences to manufacturers who get the licence to produce articles under the name of Camel Trophy or Camel. Per region and per country we look for dealers like for instance in the World Trade Fashion Centre. There is someone who

makes a living out of the sales of the Camel Collection and Camel Trophy Adventure Wear. Part of his turnover, a royalty percentage, is returned to me."

So, like the other cases, economic criteria played an expected role in regulation. Unlike the previous cases however, the manufacturing ability of the brander did not play a dominant role in evaluating the introduction of the products. The only criterion -other than the brand's core concepts -that is allowed is profitability.

6.4.5.2 Regulation related to the core concepts

The core concepts of the brand played a dominant role in the regulation of the brand. This means that regulation took place related to the core concepts. To understand this process of regulation, we have to bear in mind that Camel Trophy worked with a manufacturer and dealer who were given a license to work for the brand. Since they were responsible for the design, production and distribution, the regulation of the brand in relation to the core concepts, was the primary task of WBI. The brand regulator as a function (WBI) on the one hand and the parties that performed actions in the name of the brander (design, introduction and distribution of products) on the other were not part of the same organization. Regulation performed by this brand regulator was clearly a recognizable function that was organizationally independent and definitely in charge. In result, regulation took place mainly proactively. This was done in two ways.

First of all, brand regulation was ensured by choosing the manufacturers and dealers according to a fit with the brand. The dealer that worked for the brand had to fit with the experience and feeling that the brand was offering. He was selected by criteria that directly related to the brand's core concepts. Manufacturers were selected on the basis of their ability to produce and contribute to a particular product and brand experience:

"We want to enter into a long-lasting relationship with the manufacturers. Of course they have to deliver high-quality products that meet our high standards. These are the most important criteria. On local level you have to look for a dealer who has a good reputation, after all he is selling a brand. So he has to fit in with that specific experience".

The second way in which proactive regulation was performed in relation to the core concepts, was by carefully monitoring the process of

product development at an early stage. WBI briefed and checked their allied parties already in the stage of product design on the basis of the core concepts:

"When talking about Camel Trophy Adventure Boots, you talk about rugged shoes with thick soles. During the proposal phase you can discuss the details, more of this, less of that. First of all they will show the roughs and indicate what materials they want to use. As WBI⁹⁴ you can give input regarding the materials and styling."

By evaluating the proposals for new products on the basis of the core concepts, WBI was able to anticipate early problems and regulate the introduction of new products under the brand name Camel Trophy in a proactive way.

So, in this case, proactive regulation related to the core concepts was common. One of the possible backgrounds of this was the fact that the function and the mandate of the brand regulator were clear from the beginning. A clear (hierarchically managed) relation between the brand regulator (WBI) and the allied parties created the organizational conditions to let the core concepts play an important role in the process of regulation. Since they played such an important role proactively (- before the actual introduction of the products) reactive regulation related to the core concepts was considered less relevant. At least we could not discover attempts to do so.

6.4.5.3 Regulation based on changing the core concepts

In the case of the Camel Trophy, regulation took place proactively based on changing the core concepts; that means not in reaction to concrete problems, but in anticipation of these. It was constantly monitored by the executives whether the core concepts were still 'fashionable'. This was done in order to make sure that the communicative actions which were based on these would connect to the current state of mind of the target audience.

In the eighties, a time in which Camel Trophy became popular, rough adventure, masculinity and individualism were important concepts characterising the brand. While the mood of the times changed, the brand changed accordingly:

"We have to adjust these core values to this time and age. This needs market research in which we have to wonder: what are the standards and

values of our primary target group of 20 to 35? I don't think Camel is a brand that has to follow the trends, but further development is necessary." And: "I think that originally Camel Trophy represented adventure, individualism, masculinity. But these characteristics are also evolving. Today the perception of masculinity is different than ten years ago. Adventure is different too. In the eighties adventure was survival, nowadays adventure is very literally discovering other cultures, getting to know other cultures. In the past masculinity stood for being tough, nowadays masculinity is also being sensitive: it's a balance. I think that the values might be the same but you should constantly monitor the interpretation of these values in the spirit of the time and to what extent it is relevant to the consumer."

So, unlike other cases, the adjustment of the core concepts did not take place in reaction to concrete threats (like a negative reaction to the branders' actions or the introduction of product that do not match with the core concepts), but proactively: the core concepts of the brand Camel Trophy were monitored and – if necessary – adapted or changed so that they would relate to the state of mind of the target audience. In this way, the threats to the brander system were minimized.

Overall, the analysis of the history of regulating actions reveals that the brand's core concepts played a very important role in the process of regulation. Rather than cancelling new products after being introduced or adjusting the core concepts after being threatened, potential threats were 'blocked' in a proactive way by using or altering the core concepts.

6.4.6 Intermediate conclusion Camel Trophy

In this section, the brand Camel Trophy has been investigated by analysing both a) the conceptual structure of the brand and b) the regulating actions of the brander.

The investigation of the conceptual structure of the brand was performed to analyse the categorizing abilities of the core concepts. As far as the categorization of products was concerned, we have seen that the core concepts allow a variety of different categories of products. This could be explained by the fact that the core concepts provided a metaphorical frame of reference. The core concepts of the brand belonged to a different domain than the domain of the products. The core concepts were related to a 'domain of experiences' which served as a source domain for the products. The variety of products that could be categorized by the core

concepts on the basis of a metaphorical projection, was analysed by investigating the possible correspondences between both. Based on the peripheral supportive subconcepts – which provided a specification of the core concepts – it was possible to describe the correspondence between the core concepts and the products as: ‘enjoyable, authentic and social experiences’. We concluded that the core concepts were open to categories of products that could play a role in these experiences. Hence, their attributes: quality, authenticity and distinctness. It was concluded that the core concepts were open to those categories of products that were of good quality and had authentic and distinct characteristics so that they could be used by people who wanted to engage in or identify with ‘enjoyable, authentic and social experiences’. Except for these categorization rules offered by the core concepts, the event Camel Trophy itself supplied a context for the introduction of new products: these new products were selected on the basis of the role they could play in the course of the event. Since the event was an exemplary realisation of the core concepts, it could provide a specific context for the introduction of new products, so that these products could become excellent substantiations of these core concepts.

When it came to categorization of customers, the core concepts provided categorization rules that were based on categorizing customers on their identification with a certain ‘way of life’. So, unlike the Mars case, the categorization based on the core concepts was not explicitly related to preference for certain products, but to preference for a certain state of mind. Like in the categorization of products, the peripheral supportive subconcepts also supported the core concepts in providing categorization rules for categorizing customers. These supportive subconcepts added concepts that made it possible to categorize customers on the basis of an ideal representation of the Camel Trophy user. This ideal representation was closely related to the way of life expressed by the core concepts. Based on the ‘way of life’ expressed by the core concepts – and the supportive subconcepts – the core concepts were open to customers who could identify with a life of enjoyable and authentic experiences and who were open minded, involved, sincere and balanced.

The structural analysis concerning the risk that the core concepts would lose specificity showed that the increase in variety pressure had not threatened the specificity of the brand. First of all, we did not find a discrepancy between the core concepts. Moreover, the core concepts formed a strong unity with the peripheral supportive subconcepts. Sec-

ondly, the links between the core concepts and the article concepts were strong. All articles were linked to the core concepts by similarity links. The core concepts were represented equally at the level of the articles. Moreover, we can conclude that the use of the event as a symbolic example of the core concepts, helped to establish a conceptual connection between the brand and the products. As described above, the Camel Trophy event offered an additional context for the introduction of new products: the clothes, boots, bags and watches were all designed according to their ability to play a role in the event. So, from the structural analysis, we can conclude that the specificity of the core concepts of the Camel Trophy brand was not threatened.

The investigation of the history of regulating actions showed that the core concepts played an important role in regulation. Compared to other cases however, brand regulation was conducted in a much more proactive way. This could partly be traced back to the fact that the brand regulator (called WBI) had a clear organizational position: it was both separated from the other functions (the danger of blurring with other functions was minimized) and in hierarchically in control over the allied parties that were responsible for these other functions.

Like in all the other cases, other criteria than the core concepts played a role in the process of regulation. The criterion – other than the core concepts – that was used in this case was profitability. A criterion like manufacturing ability of the organization was of secondary importance since WBI did not own a factory. Moreover, brand regulation took place in close relationship with the core concepts in a proactive way. This concerned both the choice of allied partners and the daily management of the relationship with them. In both cases, the proactive regulation took place related to the core concepts as essential variables. Finally, unlike the other cases, the executives of Camel Trophy performed proactive regulation by adapting the core concepts when necessary to the preferences of its most important customers, even before a discrepancy between their preferences and the core concepts would lead to a negative reaction of the brand user.

Because the executives of Camel Trophy performed proactive regulation, it was not necessary to restore conceptual inconsistencies; a strong relation between the core concepts and the central distinctive subconcepts was secured by the proactive regulation related to the core concepts.

Here, the description of the cases ends. The cases were used to gain more insight in different ways in which branders deal with the dilemma between variety production and preservation of specificity. In section 7.4. of the next chapter, we will discuss the overall conclusions of the cases and conclude whether they generated the expected insights. Before doing so, we will start that chapter with a short description of the theory and methodological framework.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

In this thesis, we have tried to construct a general theory on branding. This theory does not focus either on the role of the consumer or on that of an organization, but tries to integrate the role of both into one coherent theory. With this theory, it should be possible to answer fundamental questions like, “what does branding consist of” and “what is essential for its existence and development?” The proposed theory deals with branding from a modern system theoretical perspective because it provides basic notions needed to address these more fundamental questions.

By adopting such a perspective on branding, new issues have come to the surface. We related the maintenance and development of branding to the system theoretical notions of regulation, variety and specificity. The need to study these themes in some depth stimulated us to make use of other theories, in particular of Lakoff’s cognition theory on concepts.

Modern systems theory and cognition theory provided the analytical tools to study one of the central dilemmas of brands concerning the relationship between variety and specificity. We used these tools to construct a methodological framework to investigate this. Three case studies were conducted in order to test the usefulness and, not to forget, applicability of this framework and to find new explanations for the differences between branders in dealing with the variety-specificity dilemma.

In this chapter, some concluding remarks on these subjects will be made. These refer to respectively the general theory we developed (7.2.), the methodological framework that was designed (7.3.) and the results that were gained (7.4.).

7.2 The theory

A general theory on branding must clarify the specific nature and function of branding. In our theory, branding is presented as one of the answers to a problem that affects both modern organizations and individuals: the problem of contingency. In this case, contingency refers to the problem that individuals as well as organisations somehow know that each choice they make, could be made otherwise.

Contingency is rooted in human nature. Unlike animals, humans have the ability to invent alternatives. They do not react to their environment by stimulus-response, but are able to vary their actions. Therefore, they must choose.

Due to several circumstances, this problem of choosing has become prominent for modern organizations and modern individuals. Both are confronted with ever more alternatives, while the mechanisms that have been helpful in making these choices (such as organizational forms and machines in the case of enterprises and religion or family in the case of individuals) are under pressure.

Branding provides an answer to this problem. More in particular, it can help to solve the problem of organizations (branders) and persons (brand users) at the same time. It does so by relating the process of making choices by the enterprise to the process of making choices by the customer. If the selections of both 'actors' are coupled successfully, the operations of both can become recursively related to each other. This process is called branding if this reproduction of operations develops in a structural way and is based on a generalized concept, called a brand.

One of the reasons for the popularity of branding is the fact that it provides an answer to a problem perceived by modern enterprises, i.e. the problem of building enduring relationships with its customers. Branding can help to strengthen that relationship and solve the problem of contingency of these enterprises (the brander) by relating the choice-making process of the brander to that of the customer (brand user).

Branding flourishes in a context we characterized in the first chapter as a 'symbolized world'. Branding fits in a world of symbols, a world in which everything seems to be manipulated to carry some kind of message. The work of the French sociologist Baudrillard appeared to be helpful in understanding the nature and backgrounds of such a society. Although his works carry a normative tone, not in favour of phenomena like branding, his insights are fruitful in understanding its societal con-

text. Following Baudrillard, we argued that branding has become popular in the context of consumption. Consumption, as described by Baudrillard, is based on communication and symbolic reproduction of signs. Accordingly, the consumption of objects not only concerns the 'objective' function of using these products. The objects refer to aspects transcending that 'objective' function. As such, objects become signs. Consumption is concerned with the reproduction of this 'sign language'. Brands play an important role in this reproduction process. They are one of the most powerful carriers and reproducers of these 'signs'.

In the context sketched by Baudrillard, branding is considered as a symbolic, communicative phenomenon. Consequently, the general theory on branding developed in this book is centred around the notion of communication. In this theory, branding is characterized as the constitution and reproduction of a social system, consisting of communicative operations. The system theory developed by the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann was our point of departure.

According to Luhmann, the basic elements of social systems are communications. The branding system as a social system consists of communicative actions of the brander and brand user. It is a pattern of recursively related communicative actions of both parties. It develops by the connection of the communicative actions of the brander to those of the brand user and vice versa. Branding is a system consisting of communicative actions that are constantly referring to themselves and each other. As such, the branding system is a self referential closed system, consisting of recursively related operations of brander and brand user. The system produces its unity via the reproduction of its own elements. This process is called autopoiesis.

By considering the branding system as a social system, we argued that branding is not a matter of a logo, concept, products or services. Neither of these can ever as such be an element of the branding system. We argued that each operation of say the brander is a branding operation once the brand user perceives it as a branding operation. At the same time within our theory, each operation by the brand user is a branding operation once the brander perceives it as a branding operation. This also explains why branding is a process that cannot be controlled by either brander or brand user. Both actors contribute to the branding system because they consider each other's actions as being part of the branding system. Neither of them fully controls one other in the contributions he or she makes to the branding system and in the attributions he or she makes of

behaviour. One 'party' can always ascribe some operation of the other to the branding system although it is not intentionally related to the brand. Or, an operation of one party can always remain unnoticed as a branding operation by the other, although it is indeed intentionally related to it. Because of this, we called the branding system an emergent system, which means that its existence cannot be explained by the separate intentions or actions of either the brand user or the brander. Instead, an emergent 'order' of recursively related operations is created that is a horizon of selections for the brander and brand user, based on the fact that it has been there in the past and is expected to be there in the future. In a certain sense, it reproduces itself, i.e. is a cause of itself. It (re)produces the characteristic communications typical for a specific brand.

The brand⁹⁵ plays a crucial role in the establishment and reproduction of the branding system. The brand as a generalized concept consists of general cognitive, preference and behavioural patterns. It can function as a point of reference for the communicative actions of the brander and the brand user. By doing so, it helps to orient the actions of the brander on those of the brand user and vice versa. As such, the brand concept 'drives' the reproduction of the branding system. At the same time, the brand concept cannot exist without the branding system. It is reproduced and changed via the communicative actions of both the brander and brand user. The brand is confirmed and adapted via recurrent and recursively related communicative actions of brander and brand user.

In our theory, the branding system – as an emergent system – is not 'controlled' by an instance external to the system. To understand the way in which the branding system can exist and develop, without being controlled by an external instance, cybernetic theory proved to be helpful. It describes, in a very general sense, the conditions and mechanisms which are essential for the viability of the branding system. With the help of Ashby's cybernetic theory, the branding system could be characterized and described as an ultrastable system, i.e. a system that regulates itself.

The branding system as an ultrastable system regulates itself in such way that it is reproduced. That means, it regulates itself in such a way that the operations of that system stay within certain boundaries. These are determined by the essential variables of the branding system. We described the essential variables of the branding system in a general way. We argued that these essential variables establish a restriction and orientation for the operations of the branding system. They provide 'direction' to the reproduction of the operations of the branding system. The brand-

ing system as an ultrastable system however, is also able to change its mode of behaviour by changing the values of these essential variables.

The first essential variable of a branding system concerns the fact that the operations must recursively refer to each other and give rise to new operations in that process. This essential variable concerns the ongoing process of relating the operations of the branding system. The second essential variable refers to the structure of the branding system. In order to be viable, it must have a sufficient amount of repeated communicative actions so that expectations about future communications are created. We call these expectations of future communications based on previous communications the structure of the branding system. The third essential variable of the branding system concerns the fact that the operations of the branding system must reflect some generalized brand concept. It is essential for the viability of the branding system that some generalized brand concept is reproduced via its communicative actions.

If the viability of the branding system is threatened (there is a threat that the values of the essential variables cross certain limits), the branding system in principle has several regulating mechanisms available. The stability can be restored in direct interaction with the risk threatening it. Furthermore, the branding system can change into a new mode of behaviour. Finally, it might even change the 'values' of its essential variables. These three regulating mechanisms are not performed by a specific element inside the branding system. It is not the brander that regulates the branding system, nor the brand user. Regulation of the branding system takes place in and by the communicative actions of both parties that recursively relate to each other. Processes, structures and a particular generalized brand concept are reproduced in this communicative process. If these are threatened, the viability of the branding system can be restored by and through these mutually related communicative actions.

Although neither the brander nor the brand user has absolute power over the way the branding system develops, the brander has specific interests in maintaining or developing it and consciously tries to influence the development of the branding system. He can influence the development of the branding system by regulating his own operations in a particular way. We have called the regulation of the brander's own operations 'the regulation of the brander system'. The brander system is a social system that consists of mutually related communicative actions performed by the brander. It consists of only those organizational opera-

tions that are relevant or at least treated as relevant for the reproduction of the branding system. The brander must regulate its own operations in such a way that the brander system is reproduced. By doing so, in principle a contribution is made by the brander to the development and reproduction of the branding system. Thus, the reproduction of the brander system is coupled to that of the branding system. This is reflected by the fact that in our model, the essential variables of the brander system are coupled to those of the branding system.

The existence of processes and structures of the branding system (the first two essential variables of the branding system), implies that there is some positive reaction to the operations of the brander by the brand user. A continuation of actions and of specific expectations with respect to new actions – both crucial for the viability of the branding system – can only be established if the actions of the brander are followed by positive reactions of the brand user. That means that the brander system has to be regulated in such way that it can be expected that the operations of the brander arouse some positive reaction on the part of the brand user. Without such positive reaction, the branding system cannot reproduce its processes and structures. So, the first essential variable of the brander system concerns the production of a positive reaction on the side of the brand user, which is related to the continuity and structure of the branding system.

The third essential variable of the branding system, we saw, is the existence of some shared generalized brand concept. This essential variable is coupled to two essential variables of the brander system⁹⁶. A shared generalized brand concept can only be maintained if the brander has some idea about that generalized brand concept and directs its operations to that idea. There must be a description of the brand by the brander, which we have called a normative brand concept, or brand identity. In the first place, the operations of the brander can only pay a positive contribution to the branding system, if they are in line with the brand identity. Secondly, the brand identity must be in line with – closely related to – the existing shared generalized brand concept. If these two essential variables of the brander system are met, the operations of the brander system will probably contribute positively to the third essential variable of the branding system: the reproduction of the shared generalized brand concept.

In this way, the essential variables of the brander system are coupled to those of the branding system and the viability of the brander system is linked to that of the branding system.

To understand the actions of the brander, who has to regulate his own operations in order to contribute to the existence and development of the branding system, we have used Ashby's insights on regulation. Like the branding system, the brander system can be analysed as an ultrastable system. The brander system is not regulated by an external system, but it regulates itself. The function that regulates the brander system is called the brand regulator. The regulation of the brander system by the brand regulator is based on processes in which the brand regulator tries to keep the operations of the brander within certain limits. By regulating the operations of the brander, the brand regulator tries to make sure that operations are performed in such way that the stability of the brander system is maintained or restored and the operations of the brander can contribute to the branding system.

The brand regulator can use different kinds of models for the regulation of the brander's operations. Among these are models that describe the brander and the branding system, models that describe the environment of these systems, models of the essential variables of both systems, models that describe possible disturbances confronting both systems and lastly models that describe successful and less successful actions of the brander system. In fact all these models are needed for proper regulation. The brand regulator has several different regulating options at his disposal to restore stability should disturbances occur. For example, if there is a threat that the brander's operations do not match with a certain brand identity, the brand regulator must react. Let's say, this essential condition – the need to keep the operations in line with a certain brand identity – is threatened because an advertising campaign is proposed that does not reflect the brand identity. In the first place, the brand regulator can deal with a threat to the system in direct interaction. This means he displays behaviour, within the same mode of behaviour, and changes the advertising campaign. In such a way, he restores the situation and makes sure that his operations come within the limits of the brand identity again. Secondly, he can switch to a new mode of behaviour in order to restore stability. For instance, he launches a new product that is based on the same brand identity. Thirdly, he can restore stability by changing a mode of behaviour and changing the values of the essential variables. For instance, launching a PR campaign based on a changed brand identity. These three "regulating mechanisms" are at the disposal of the brand regulator. By using these, he can try to ensure that the brander's operations make a positive contribution to the branding system.

We started with the ambition to understand the nature of branding. In order to do so, we thought we had to use other scientific theories than the ones common in branding literature. We have treated branding as a social phenomenon, as a social system that reproduces itself by related communications. The branding system is a complex of mutually related communications that maintains a certain orientation and 'direction'. The principle by which this 'direction' is established and maintained is named 'regulation'.

In this way, our theory creates a particular perspective, it provides a specific way of looking at branding. This implies that it highlights specific problems and issues. Among others⁹⁷, two issues in particular are put on the foreground, namely the regulation of the brander system by the brander and the dilemma he is facing in this process.

Firstly, a brander must regulate his operations in such way that they are in line with the essential variables. That means that they meet the demands of a) producing a certain level of positive reactions and b) reflecting a specific brand identity and c) matching a brand identity that is in line with the generalized brand concept.

This is difficult enough in normal situations, but it becomes even more complicated when the brander receives proposals to increase the variety of operations. These can exist in proposals from the organization and from customers to introduce new products or to change existing ones. So, *secondly*, the brander is faced with a real dilemma in regulating his operations: the need for more variety means pressure on the need to maintain a specific brand identity. The brander must be loyal to a specific brand identity – make sure that his operations are in line with a brand identity – and at the same time respond to the question for more variety.

This dilemma was the main subject of our empirical investigation. More in particular, at the end of chapter 2, we defined our research question as: how can we explain the differences between branders concerning the way they keep a specific brand identity in case the variety increases? At the end of chapter 2, we divided this up into three questions, which referred to three kinds of differences we were interested in:

- Differences in the ability of the brand identity to absorb a variety of products
- Differences in the ability of the brand identity to stay specific at the same time
- Differences in the way brand regulators perform regulating actions.

In the next section, we will describe the methodological framework that we designed to investigate these questions.

7.3 The methodological framework

In this section, we discuss how systems theory and theories about concepts were used to build a methodological framework for the investigation of the research question described at the end of the previous section. The framework consists of two parts. The first part was designed to investigate differences between brand identities with respect to the degree of variety that is allowed and with respect to the risk that their specificity is lost. As we discuss in this section, this first part of the methodological framework mainly deals with the analysis of the conceptual structure of the brand – as it is perceived by the brander. Not surprisingly, this part of the framework is based on theories of concepts. The second part of the framework was designed to analyse ways of regulation and is based on cybernetics.

We will start with a short recapitulation of the nature of concepts and conceptual structures and an application of these insights to brands. It will enable us to describe the first part of the methodological framework regarding the structure of the brand concept. We will proceed then with a discussion of the second part of the framework – concerning the history of regulating actions –. We will finish this section by linking our research questions to the analyses that were performed in our empirical investigation.

The first part of the framework: the conceptual structure of the brand

For an investigation of the conceptual structure of a brand, insights are needed in the nature of concepts and conceptual structures. Lakoff's theory on concepts and Idealized Cognitive Models (ICM's) is helpful in this respect. His theory provides a basis for analyzing conceptual structures. It assumes that we build up and use concepts to make sense of our experiences. Put roughly, concepts are considered in this theory as means by which we can make sense of the world. These concepts provide rules for categorizing 'things' we observe or make use of. The observation of these concepts gives insight in the variety of 'things' we categorize and vice versa. Concepts also provide information about the meaning of a category's members. For instance, to understand the process of categorizing

someone as 'mother', we have to understand our concept of 'mother'. It is that concept of 'mother' that determines how we think about 'mothers' and who we consider as (prototypical) members of the category 'mother'.

Concepts are related to other concepts and have an internal structure as well. With respect to the first point, Lakoff (1987: 74) has shown that for the investigation of the category 'mother' for instance, it is not sufficient to study the concept of mother in isolation. It can only be understood properly if it is related to other concepts, such as 'children' or 'father'. With respect to the second, Lakoff has argued that most concepts are complex concepts, consisting of various subconcepts. The concept 'mother' for instance, consists of various subconcepts, like 'stepmother', 'birth mother', 'adoptive mother', foster mother, etc (Lakoff, 1987: 83).

So, to understand the 'categorizing ability' of concepts, we had to study the way these concepts are related to other concepts and the way they are built up from subconcepts. It is this conceptual structure that explains why we are more inclined to ascribe one person to the category mother and another person not. These conceptual structures can be characterized by a type of Idealized Cognitive Model (ICM). The internal structure of the concept mother, for instance, is characterized as a metonym ICM: there is one 'central case of mother'⁹⁹ and various peripheral subconcepts, like the stepmother and the others described above. Lakoff has identified various types of ICM's that can be used to analyse and characterize the structure of a concept.

In chapter 4, we argued that these notions of concepts and conceptual structures can be applied to branding and can be used to understand the variety-specificity dilemma. We did not consider the brand as being part of a category of products, nor as a category in itself. We regarded the brand as a concept. Like all concepts, brand concepts provide rules to categorize a variety of different kinds of 'things' and persons. By considering brands as concepts, insight can be gained in the way they group together 'things' and 'persons' and in the specific meaning that is added to them. It is the 'concept of Coca-Cola' that determines the variety of products and the variety of persons that can be linked to and can be considered as prototypical for the brand. It is also the concept of Coca-Cola that then determines the way we think about these products and persons.

Like all concepts, brands as concepts are related to other concepts. The brand concept of Coca-Cola can only be understood in relationship to concepts like 'drinking' or 'soft drinks'. Brands can also be considered as complex concepts, which have an internal structure, consisting of differ-

ent subconcepts. The brand Coca-Cola consists of various subconcepts, like 'taste', 'ubiquity', 'American', building up the complex brand concept of Coca Cola.

Like all concepts, the categorizing ability of brand concepts can be related to the structure of the brand concept – i.e. to the way it is related to other concepts and to the relationships between its constituting subconcepts. An investigation of the conceptual structure of the brander's concept of the brand should therefore uncover the mechanisms underlying the categorization of products and customers and provide insight in the abilities of a brand identity to 'integrate' a variety of them. Dependent on the brand's conceptual structure, the brand concept can allow a more or less variety of categorized products, services or persons. Structural analysis also allows investigating the risk of the brand of losing specificity. Dependant on the structure of the brand concept the risk that this specific meaning is diluted can be greater or lesser.

So: the structure of a brand concept can be analysed by using Idealized Cognitive Models (ICMs). And: the characterization of the conceptual structure of a brand by an ICM provides insight in both issues of variety 'absorption' and specificity dilution.

The conceptual structure of a brand can be analysed, when the conceptual structure is divided into different levels, dividing the brand concept into different kinds of subconcepts. We distinguished between the level of the brand identity (indicating the part of the conceptual structure that must 'absorb' variety and remain specific at the same time) and the level of the brand articles (indicating the part of the conceptual structure that represents the actual variety). At the level of the brand identity the analysis distinguishes the strategic concepts of the brand: the core concepts, and the concepts that support these: the peripheral supportive subconcepts. At the level of the article concepts a distinction is made between the strategically most important concepts – the central distinctive subconcepts – and the subconcepts concerning the category of products. We argued that, once the brand concept is divided into these different conceptual levels, the analysis of the actual structure is based on investigating these subconcepts separately and examining both the relationships between subconcepts at the same conceptual level and the relationships between subconcepts at different conceptual levels. To find these different subconcepts of the brand we interviewed executives engaged in brand management and studied documents that could clarify the way they thought about these different elements of the brand.

This part of the framework, designed to analyse the concepts and conceptual structure of the brand, should provide insight in both the variety of products that can be integrated by the brand identity and in the risk that it loses specificity.

To gain insight into *the variety of products or services* that are and possibly can be categorized by the brand identity, the investigation starts with an identification of the core concepts of the brand. We proposed to analyse the content of the core concepts and to examine whether this provides information about the variety of products and customers that could be categorized by that concept. Besides this, we suggested investigating the relationship between the core concepts and the article concepts¹⁰⁰. We identified three relevant ICMs by which this relationship can be characterized, all of which have different consequences for the variety absorbing potential of the brand concept: the taxonomic, the feature bundle and the metaphor ICM. We expected to find that these three models provide different kinds of rules for categorizing products and customers and have different consequences for the variety that can be absorbed by the brand concept.

To gain an insight in *the risk of a brand to lose specificity*, we proposed to investigate the relationship between the core concepts and the central distinctive subconcepts of the articles. This part of the methodological framework is based on the possibility of finding (in)consistencies between the core concepts themselves and between the core concepts and the central distinctive subconcepts of the articles. We suggested that the more consistencies were found, the less risk there is that the brand identity loses specificity. Regarding the (in)consistencies between the core concepts and the central distinctive subconcepts of the articles, we identified various kinds of links that related with various degrees of (in)consistency. In the event that these concepts are linked to each other by an instance link and a similarity link, this risk seems to be minimal. The transformation link implies more risk. If the relationship between the core concepts and the central distinctive subconcepts is characterized by a contradiction link, the consistency is low and the risk of losing specificity is high.

The second part of the framework: the analysis of the regulating actions

Besides the analysis of the conceptual structure of the brand, another part of the methodological framework was designed to analyse the regulating ability of the brand regulator. It was used for the investigation of

the history of regulating actions. This investigation was considered relevant because we expected that it could provide more in-depth knowledge concerning the differences between branders in dealing with the risk of specificity loss.

This part of the framework distinguishes between different forms of regulation. First of all, it makes a distinction between reactive and proactive regulation. Secondly, it introduces a distinction between different regulation forms, based on the role of the core concepts in the process of regulating the brander's operations. We will review both now.

With respect to the first distinction, we argued that the brand regulator has a choice between reactive regulation and proactive regulation. This distinction has to do with the ability to foresee and deal with possible risks in the future. In the case of reactive regulation this ability is minimal or not used. Reactive regulation concerns the performance of regulating actions once a risk¹⁰¹ is already there. Proactive regulation refers to the performance of regulating actions in the absence of an immediate risk. A brand regulator that performs proactive regulation is able to invent ways of dealing with expected risks before these become real. We expect that this form of regulation in particular is helpful in preventing specificity loss.

With respect to the second distinction, the role of the core concepts in the process of regulation can differ. When, for example, the brander system is threatened by a risk that comes from the proposal of a new product that is not in line with the brand identity, this new product proposal can be accepted, adapted, or rejected by using diverse criteria. In the first place, this can be other criteria than the core concepts. Secondly, it can be accepted, rejected or adapted by using the core concepts as a criterion. Thirdly, the products can be accepted, rejected or adapted based on a change of the core concepts.

These different forms of regulatory actions can be combined; a brand regulator can perform reactive regulation and perform these regulating actions with or without relating to or changing the core concepts. As such, a combination of six regulating options is possible. The analysis of these forms of regulation provides insight in the regulating ability of the brander in relationship to the challenge to keep a specific brand identity and link new products to it at the same time. We expected to find a match between particular forms of regulating actions and particular conceptual structures: weaker structures would be related to forms of reactive regulation that were not related to the core concepts.

In sum, we have seen in this section that, based on Lakoff’s theory on concepts and on systems theory (more specifically, cybernetics), it was possible to construct a framework for the investigation of the our research question: how to explain differences between branders with respect to their ability to keep their operations in line with the brand identity. In figure 7.1 below, we present an overview of the way in which this first research question can be investigated by using concept theory and cybernetics.

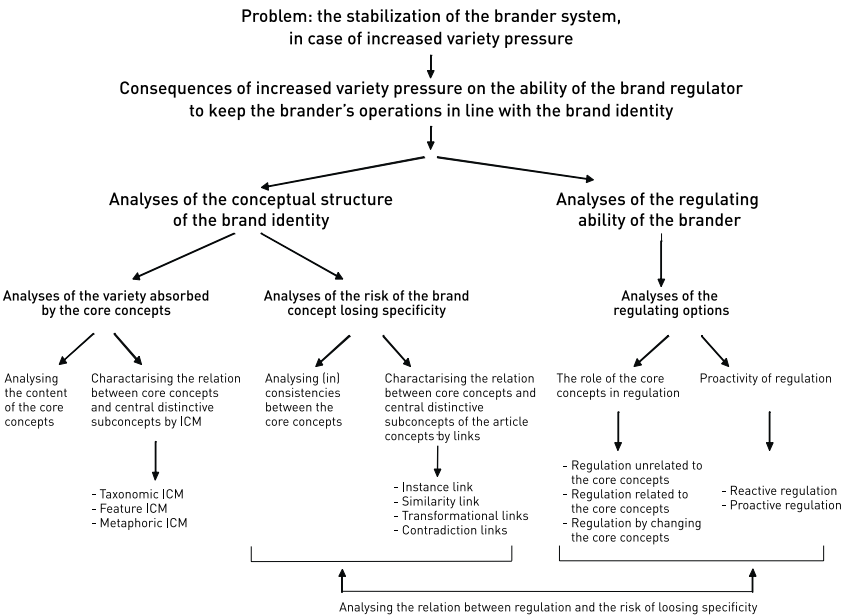


Figure 7.1

So, first research question was to investigate the differences in the ways in which different brand regulators manage to stabilize the brander system against the background of increased variety pressure. There were two kinds of differences we addressed: differences in the ability to absorb variety and differences in the way branders perform regulating actions. In this section, we addressed the second research question, i.e. how to use theoretical insights on systems theory and on concepts to investigate the first research question. In the next section, we will discuss the investigation and outcomes of the first research question.

7.4 The framework put in practice: new insights in the variety – specificity dilemma

7.4.1 Introduction

To find answers to our research question, we performed an empirical investigation among three branders that were exposed to more variety pressure because new products were attached to their brands. In this section, the results of this empirical research are discussed.

The empirical investigation in fact served two goals. First of all, it was used to test the usefulness of the methodological framework (7.4.2.). Secondly, it was used to generate new insights concerning the questions of the differences between branders in dealing with the variety-specificity dilemma, (7.4.3.).

7.4.2 The usefulness of the methodological framework

The test of the usefulness of the methodological framework was to provide answers to two questions: has it been possible to actually identify the (sub)concepts of the brand identity at the different levels as we proposed and did the use of the framework provide insight in the differences between branders in dealing with the variety – specificity dilemma?

With respect to the analysis of the conceptual structure of the brand, the case studies have shown that it was indeed possible to unravel the brander's concept of the brand into different conceptual levels. In all cases, the core concepts, as understood by the brander, could be identified. It was also possible to recognize the central distinctive subconcepts of the articles. The executives could clearly indicate what – in their opinion – should differentiate their articles from those of competitors. The core concepts were written down and our study of the documents sometimes challenged, but most of the times supported, the information given by the executives.

With respect to the study of the regulating actions of the brander, we could clearly identify the distinctions between different forms of regulation distinguished in the behaviour of all branders¹⁰².

The effectiveness of the framework is discussed more in depth in three respects:

- 1 Can the different abilities to *absorb variety* of brand identities, be re-

- lated to a) differences in the frame of reference provided by the core concepts and b) differences with respect the content of these core concepts?
- 2 Can the differences between brand identities concerning the *risks of losing specificity*, be related to a) differences in the relationship between the core concepts and b) differences in the relationship between the core concepts and the central distinctive subconcepts of the articles?
 - 3 Can differences in the conceptual structures of the brands be related to differences in the regulating actions performed by the brander?

We will discuss these questions now.

Causes of differences in variety regulation

The cases show that different frames of reference are indeed related to different abilities to absorb variety. The core concepts of the Mars brand, for instance, provide a feature frame of reference. The underlying principle by which the variety of products is related to the Mars brand is based on specific – product related – features, like taste, energy or eating experience. This results in a variety of products linked to the Mars brand that is limited to chocolate products with a particular taste. The Camel Trophy brand, in contrast, had a relatively large variety of products and services linked to its brand (from watches, boots, clothing, bags and racing events). This variety of products was made possible from a conceptual point of view, by a conceptual link between these products, based on a metaphorical frame of reference. The link is provided by core concepts that are related to another domain than the product domain. The products did not just share physical product features, but were integrated by the brand identity on the basis of a reference to a mentality indicated by the motto ‘Life live, choose, do and enjoy’. So, the difference in variety absorption capacity between brand identities of Mars and Camel Trophy could be related to the type of frame of reference provided by the core concepts of these brands.

Although the core concepts of the brand Douwe Egberts (‘togetherness’ and ‘care’) also provide a metaphorical frame of reference, this did not lead to a great variety of products. The products related to the Douwe Egberts brand were all coffee products. They were supposed to be integrated – not by product features but – by the concepts togetherness and care. However, although the actual variety of products linked to the brand

was limited, the executives thought about a greater variety of products that could be linked to the brand, from cookies to coffees. They even thought of cafés as fitting the brand. This variety of products could be related to the frame of reference (coffee, cookies and cafés do not share any product features). They are integrated by a conceptual link that could only be established because the core concepts belonged to another domain than the product domain. It was due to other reasons¹⁰³ that these products were not yet linked to the brand. The variety of products that could be categorized on the basis of the core concepts was greater than in the case of the Mars brand, which provided a feature frame of reference. Although we have not explicitly investigated the frames of reference in relationship to the differences in the *variety* of customers that could be categorized, we did find that the frames of references offered different principles underlying the categorization of customers. For instance, we saw that core concepts providing a metaphorical frame of reference gave rise to symbolic concepts that could directly be translated into traits of persons. The core concepts of the Camel Trophy brand for instance, were related to concepts like 'independent', 'mature' and 'self confident'. These provided a rather precise categorization of persons. The feature frame of reference provided features that categorized persons on the basis of product features. In the Mars case, people were categorized on their preference for a particular chocolate taste.

The different characteristics of brand identities to absorb a variety of products could also be related to differences in the content of the core concepts. This element of our framework was useful in explaining differences in the categorizing ability of core concepts providing *the same* frame of reference. In the Mars case, we identified two versions of the core concepts: 'taste and eating experience' on the one hand and 'taste and energy' on the other. Since these were characterized as providing the same frame of reference (a feature frame of reference), the differences between them in terms of the variety absorption capacity was traced back to the differences in the content of these core concepts (eating experience and energy). We concluded that the concept 'energy' can potentially categorize a larger variety of products than the core concept eating experience. The reason for this is that the concept eating experience is related to the 'human senses', which puts more restrictions to the manufacturing abilities than the concept 'energy'. The content of the core concepts also leads to differences in categorizing customers. We concluded that both versions of the core concepts provide different rules for the categoriza-

tion of customers. The core concept 'energy' gives rise to categorizing new customers based on product attributes (based on different formats, eating experiences). The core concept 'eating experience' makes it possible to further categorize customers on the basis of benefits (energy, indulgence).

Differences in the risk of losing specificity

We also analysed whether the differences between brands with respect to the risk of losing specificity could be the result of the relationship between core concepts and of the relationship between these core concepts and the central distinctive subconcepts of the articles.

Differences in the relationship between the core concepts did result in differences with respect to the risk of specificity loss. The different versions of the core concepts in the Mars case resulted in a conceptual structure with inconsistencies. The existence of two versions created a division in the conceptual structure of the brand¹⁰⁴. Because of that, the power of the core concepts to provide a specific meaning to the articles decreased. As a result, the risk of losing specificity increased. The close relationship of the core concepts in the Camel Trophy case, on the contrary, had a positive effect on the consistency of the overall conceptual structure. In this case, the close relationship between the core concepts prevented the conceptual structure of the brand from diverging into separate inconsistent parts. The power of the core concepts to add specificity to new articles linked to the brand was never diminished. In consequence, the risk that the brand would lose specificity as result of increased variety of articles was minimal.

The cases indicated that differences in the risk of losing specificity could also result from the relationship between core concepts and the article concepts. Where we found relatively more instance links and similarity links, the core concepts could play a more important role in providing a specific meaning to the articles. Hence, there was also a better chance that their specific meaning was preserved via the 'reproduction' of their meaning through the articles. In those cases where we discovered more transformational and contradiction links (Mars and Douwe Egberts), the core concepts played a less important role. Consequently, the risk that their specificity was threatened increased. The characterization of the relationship between the core concepts and the central distinctive subconcepts in terms of different links – proposed by the framework – thus provided insight in the differences between brand identities in maintaining their role as provider of specificity.

The relationship between conceptual structures and regulating actions

Finally, we analysed whether the differences in the conceptual structures were related to differences in the forms of regulation that were used. On the one hand, we have seen that different regulating actions give rise to different conceptual structures. Some regulating actions have a more positive influence on the consistency of the conceptual structures – and have a decreasing effect on the risk of losing specificity – , while the performance of other regulating actions increases the chance of inconsistent conceptual structures – and consequently, increase the risk of the brand to lose specificity. Generally speaking, branders that performed reactive regulation and regulation that took place unrelated to the core concepts (at some stage Mars and to a lesser degree Douwe Egberts) increased the inconsistencies of their conceptual structures. Branders that performed proactive regulation and carried out regulating actions that were related to the core concepts, were via these actions able to create more consistent conceptual structures (the Camel Trophy case).

On the other hand, we can conclude that particular conceptual structures have led to particular regulating actions. For instance, the fact that Mars or Douwe Egberts performed reactive regulating actions was related to the fact that they were confronted with inconsistencies in their conceptual structures. Moreover, in the case of Douwe Egberts, inconsistencies in the conceptual structure of the brand were recognized as a problem. In reaction to it, the brander made some attempts and proposals to remove the inconsistencies in the conceptual structure of its brand proactively. The Camel Trophy case also showed that proactive regulation, while changing the core concepts, seems to be easier if there are fewer inconsistencies between the core concepts and the central distinctive sub-concepts of the articles. Apparently, the use of particular regulating actions is one of the causes and at the same time a possible consequence of inconsistencies in the conceptual structure of the investigated brands.

So, the distinctions and relationships in our framework – proposing a relationship between different conceptual structures and different forms of regulation – increased the insight in the risk of a brand to lose specificity. The cases have proved the importance of certain forms of regulation for the consistency of conceptual structures and the value of particular conceptual structures for the performance of certain forms of regulation.

In sum, the cases have shown that differences with respect to variety absorption and specificity loss can be related to differences in the concep-

tual structure of brands and differences in the way branders perform regulating actions. As such, the methodological framework provided relevant distinctions needed to provide insight in our first research question. Besides that, these distinctions could also be relevant for use in practice. We have seen in some cases, that weak spots in the conceptual structure of brands can remain unnoticed. The Douwe Egberts for instance, showed that inconsistencies in the conceptual structure can be resolved once they are detected. The application of our methodological framework could be useful to uncover these weak spots by the identification of conceptual inconsistencies and could therefore be helpful for the prevention of brand dilution in an early stage. Moreover, it can enlarge the brander's understanding on his own way of regulation. This can lead to embracing other kinds of regulation that increase the chance of consistent conceptual structures and a strong brand.

Here, we end our treatment of the usefulness of the methodological framework for the investigation of our research questions. In the next section, we will discuss the new insights that were produced by using this framework in the analysis of the actual practice of branders.

7.4.3 New insights in the variety – specificity dilemma

The use of the framework we described in the previous paragraph made it possible to relate the ability to deal with the variety-specificity dilemma to the conceptual structure of the brand and the regulating actions of the brander. We have seen that the methodological framework provides insight in separate parts of the variety-specificity dilemma: the capacity to absorb variety, the risk of losing specificity and the performance of adequate regulating actions. In this section, we will discuss what the investigation of these issues teaches us about our research question, and whether the demands of variety and specificity can be satisfied at the same time.

In chapter 3, we argued that the demands of variety and specificity can be contradictory. The more variety a brand absorbs, the more difficult it can be to stay specific. In chapter 3, we also discussed Ellis' theory on categorization (1993). In his view, some broader categories (e.g. evaluative categories like 'high quality') are vague and not specific. These can bind a great variety of different kinds of 'things', but are not very specific in terms of the meaning they add to these 'things'. Other categories (highly specific categories like 'ABS', used by car brands) show an opposite effect.

They are restricted as to the variety of 'things' they bind together, but add a very specific meaning to the members of the category. In other words, variety and specificity *can* be opposites. The same argument can be applied to brands. A brand can absorb a lot of variety, but once it has done so, it *can* become unspecific. In some cases however, a brand can absorb variety and at the same time stay specific. The question, then, is how we can explain differences between branders in reconciling these demands: how can we explain differences between branders in absorbing variety and at the same time preserve specificity?

In chapter 4, we argued that this dilemma has been subject to other scientific investigations, especially in the so called extension research. This research is mainly concerned with the influence of the introduction of new products to existing brands (called extensions) on the evaluation of these products or on the evaluation of the existing brands. More in particular, this kind of research focuses on possible determinants of an evaluation of an extension¹⁰⁵ or determinants of the evaluation of a brand that is linked with new extensions¹⁰⁶. Based on our methodological research framework, we investigated the dilemma in a different way. In general, our research differs in two respects: it adopts 1). a conceptual and 2). a brander's perspective on the brand.

With respect to the first point, in most extension research a brand is considered as part of a product category. These investigations consider the brand as a part of a product category; for instance a 'toothpaste brand', a 'car brand', a 'cereal brand'. In our research on the contrary, the brand is considered not as part of a category, but as a concept itself that binds together products or services. As such, we join Kapferer (1992) and Broniarczyk and Alba (1994). These authors have brought forward the idea that differences between products or services can be 'bridged' by the power of a brand concept. It assumes that brands can have the power to bind a variety of products as long as they provide a strong conceptual link. Although both Kapferer and Broniarczyk and Alba stress the importance of the brand as a concept, their work has not resulted in a conceptual approach to branding. We have adopted such an approach which is focused on the investigation of the concept itself. We investigated the impact of the structure of the brand concept. By that, we are able to analyse the ability of the brand concept (brand identity) to provide a conceptual link between products.

With respect to the second point, the extension research in most cases focuses on the evaluation of these extensions and brands by *consumers*.

Unlike the discussed extension research (including Broniarczyk and Alba), we have stressed the importance of *the brander's* concept of the brand. Instead of just explaining the variety potential or the threat of brand specificity dilution by the way the brand is evaluated by consumers, our theory and research is based on the assumption that both aspects are highly influenced by the way the brand is treated and perceived by the brander himself. In this respect, we follow Kapferer's treatment of the brand identity. However, unlike Kapferer, we developed a theory and research method concerning the regulation of the brand by the brander involving an analysis of the role of the brand concept in this process of regulation. In our view, branding from a brander's perspective can be described as the performance of particular kinds of regulating actions. The application of systems theoretical insights on branding made it possible to approach the brander's contribution to branding in a systematic and detailed way.

Based on this combined conceptual and systemic approach to branding, new insights could be gained into the ability of a brand to deal with the variety – specificity dilemma. This could not have been obtained in a separate analysis of the conceptual structure of the brand identity or the regulating actions but arise from relating both to each other.

We have discovered that three things contribute to the reconciliation of the demand of variety absorption with the demand of specificity preservation.

- 1 The ability to vary and stay specific at the same time is improved if the strategically most important concepts of a brand identity have certain conceptual characteristics. The demands can be more easily reconciled if the core concepts provide a metaphorical frame of reference than if they provide a feature frame of reference. Especially if this metaphorical frame of reference is related to an 'external' phenomenon (such as an event) it is easier to reconcile these demands of variety production and specificity preservation.
- 2 A brander is more capable of increasing variety and keeping a brand specific if the conceptual inconsistencies between concepts are minimal. That concerns the conceptual relationship a) between the core concepts themselves and b) between the core concepts and the central distinctive subconcepts of the articles. If there are major inconsistencies among the core concepts and between these concepts and the central distinctive subconcepts of the articles, the increase in variety is likely to threaten the specificity of the brand.

- 3 The demands of variety and specificity can be combined more easily if the brander performs specific regulating actions. That means: in those cases in which a) regulation by the brander takes place related to the core concepts, b) in cases where regulating actions are performed by changing the core concepts c) where regulation takes place proactively. Especially proactive regulation helps to prevent conceptual problems. If the brander – instead – performs reactive regulation and/or regulation unrelated to the core concepts, it turned out to be more difficult to reconcile these demands.

We will discuss these three insights in greater detail.

Ad.1 The characteristics of the brand identity

The extension research tries to explain the ability of a brand to absorb a variety of products by investigating the acceptance of these products by consumers. However, we have considered the acceptance of products by consumers from a brander's point of view. More in particular, we have seen that acceptance of products by consumers is only one of the three essential variables for the regulation of the brander system. A brander should also take into consideration whether new variety is in line with the concepts that are considered of strategic importance¹⁰⁷ (the core concepts). Based on the research of Mars we can conclude that the consumer can be willing to accept a great variety of products, but that the acceptance of these products by consumers does not automatically mean that the brand's core concepts are reproduced by that. The consumer does not feel the threat of a brand becoming less specific because new products are related to the brand. The dilemma between variety and specificity exists as a problem only for the brander. Consequently, the capacity of a brand to absorb variety must be perceived from the perspective of the brander's perspective on the brand's scope, given the need to reproduce the core concepts.

In the extension research – investigating the variety problem from the perspective of the consumer – these two research questions are investigated separately: the acceptance of certain variety of products by consumers (variety) and the impact of certain products on their evaluation of the brand (risk of losing specificity). It is not investigated as a dilemma or a problem, because it is not felt as such by the consumer. Following a brander's perspective, we could investigate this dilemma as a problem: we could look at the capacity of the brander's concept to absorb variety with-

out losing specificity at the same time. We have investigated this capacity by analysing the content and frame of reference provided by the core concepts.

Although the analysis of the content of the core concepts was fruitful in understanding their ability to absorb a variety of products and customers, we could not generate insights concerning the relationship between the content of core concepts and the ability of the brand identity to absorb variety and preserve specificity. We have only seen that an analysis of the content provides relevant information about the variety absorbing capacity of the brand identity in individual cases.

The analysis of the frame of reference provided by the core concepts did lead to some general insights concerning the ability of a brand identity to reconcile the demands of variety and specificity. In chapter 5, we have described three possible frames of reference. Two of them – the feature frame of reference and the metaphorical frame of reference – were found in the cases. The other frame of reference – the taxonomic frame of reference – was not used in them.

We found *first of all* that a brand that provided a metaphorical frame of reference it is better able to reconcile the two demands than when it provides a feature frame of reference. In general terms, a metaphorical frame of reference is based on making a relationship between a 'product domain' and another domain (the so called 'source domain'). For instance, in the Douwe Egberts case, the core concepts 'togetherness and care' provided a metaphorical frame of reference¹⁰⁸. The fact these concepts belong to the domain of social relations makes it possible to link these concepts to products that do not share product similarities; i.e. belong to different categories of products. Then, from a conceptual point of view, a variety of different kinds of products could be linked to the concepts 'togetherness and care'.

In contrast the core concepts providing a feature frame of reference do belong to the domain of products. They propose an integration of products based on product characteristics. The core concepts of the Mars case ('taste and eating experience' and 'taste and energy') are examples of this. Based on the metaphorical frame of reference, the core concepts of Douwe Egberts were *potentially* better able to integrate a variety of different kinds of products without increasing the risk to lose specificity (from coffee to cookies and cafés), than the core concepts of Mars, which provided a feature frame of reference that could only integrate 'chocolate products with a certain taste'. Potentially because these categorizations were not ac-

tually put in practice by the brander Douwe Egberts. However, this was confirmed actually by the Camel case. In the Camel case, the core concepts also provided a metaphorical frame of reference. This made it possible to link a great variety of products to the brand – ranging from bags, watches, boots to services like adventurous road trips –. This variety was bound together conceptually by a metaphorical frame of reference.

Secondly, a comparison of the Douwe Egberts case and the Camel Trophy case – both cases where core concepts provided a metaphorical frame of reference – shows that if a source domain of a metaphorical frame of reference is explicitly linked to an ‘external’ symbolic phenomenon, the ability of the core concepts to reconcile the demands of variety absorption and specificity preservation is improved. In the Camel Trophy case, the source domain was linked to such a phenomenon, the Camel Trophy event. This functioned as a symbolic example of the Camel Trophy brand. As an exemplary example of the core concepts, this event provided meanings which helped in linking new products to the brand. The products of Camel Trophy – clothing, bags, watches and boots – were also selected on the basis of the fact that they could be used during the event. Moreover, the existence of this event as a symbolic example helped to strengthen the link between the core concepts and the article concepts. The core concepts – ‘choose’, ‘do and enjoy’ – expressed a ‘general’ mentality. The Camel Trophy as symbolic example provided a possible additional link between the brand and the products: the clothing, the bags, watches and boots were also considered as possible props for the event. This additional link between the brand and the products helped to strengthen the brand.

Ad.2 The inconsistencies of the conceptual structure

In the extension research that investigates the impact of new products on the evaluation of the brand, the risk of a brand to become less specific is an explicit focus¹⁰⁹. This research relates the risk of brand dilution to the evaluation of the brand by the consumer. This risk can also be investigated from the perspective of the brander: if he is not aware of the importance of maintaining the specificity of the core concepts in the case of increase of variety, it is likely that an increase in variety will lead to a decrease of specificity. This awareness of the importance of the core concepts was investigated by analysing the (development of the) conceptual structure of the brand over the course of time.

In our framework, we have related the risk of a brand losing its specificity to the existence of conceptual inconsistencies. We have argued that

the more inconsistencies appear in the conceptual structure of the brand, the greater the risk that the brand identity will lose specificity if variety pressure is increased. We have identified two possible forms of such inconsistencies: a) inconsistency between the core concepts and b) inconsistency between the core concepts and the central distinctive subconcepts of the articles¹¹⁰. The results of the case studies show that these forms of inconsistency can threaten the specificity of the brand in the case of increased variety pressure. Stated differently, the addition of new variety to the brand does not have to lead to a decrease in the specificity of the brand if the conceptual coherence is maintained. We will now look at both inconsistencies as they appeared in the cases.

A). The discrepancy between the core concepts of the brand. In the case of Douwe Egberts, the interpretation by some executives of one of the core concepts ('care') was unrelated to another core concept ('togetherness'). In this version of the brand concept, the concept 'care' referred to 'care for the product' while in combination with the other core concept 'togetherness', the concept was interpreted as 'human care'. When new products were linked to the brand, the brander had the choice to which 'version' of the core concepts these products should be linked. Should these be related to the core concepts 'care for product', or to the other interpretation of care, 'human care'? Because some of the new products were linked to the first version – which seemed to allow more variety – the specificity of the core concepts was endangered. First of all, this was the case because the other core concept - 'togetherness' - more or less faded away to the background. Secondly, because some of these new products did indeed match with the interpretation of 'care for product', but did not match with or even contradicted with the other core concept 'togetherness'. As a result, conceptual inconsistencies arose between these articles and the core concept 'togetherness', which endangered the specificity of the brand.

In the previous section, we discussed the discrepancy between the two versions of the Mars brand identity. In that case, we discovered that the existence of two versions led to severe inconsistencies between the core concepts and the article concepts. Once new products were linked to one version of the core concepts, it decreased the specificity of the other version because they were linked to other concepts.

So, if there is not a clear and consistent conceptual relationship between the core concepts, the addition of new variety can endanger the specificity of the brand. Stated in a positive way: if there is just one ver-

sion of consistent core concepts, the risk is diminished that an increase in the variety of new products will lead to a decrease of specificity. The Camel Trophy case was a good example of this thesis: the core concepts were consistently related to each other and there was only one version of them. As a result, the articles were linked to the same core concepts and the specificity of the core concepts was 'distributed equally across these products'.

B). The cases also showed that *conceptual inconsistencies between the core concepts and the central distinctive subconcepts* weaken the capacity of the core concepts to preserve specificity. This can be concluded from the Mars and the Douwe Egberts case, where we found that the core concepts were related to *some* articles by transformational and contradiction links. In these cases, the specific meaning of the core concepts could not be preserved. Increases in the variety of new products led to a less dominant or even minimal place of the core concepts within the conceptual structure, and thus endangered the specificity of the brand. We also found that new products (variety), which are linked to the core concept(s) by an instance link or a similarity link, do not increase the risk that the brand will lose specificity because of the dominance of the core concepts in the conceptual structure. In the Mars, Douwe Egberts and Camel cases, we have identified these links. In the last case, all articles were linked to the core concepts by similarity links, which meant that the increase in variety went hand in hand with the preservation of the specificity of the brand.

So our research shows that if conceptual coherence is maintained, the addition of new products – i.e. the increase of variety – to the brand must not lead to a decrease in the specificity of that brand.

Ad.3 The regulating actions performed by the brander

From the last two sections, we can conclude that the ability of a brand to reconcile the demands of variety and specificity is based on principles concerning the conceptual structure of the brand. In the case of consistent conceptual structures it is more likely that these demands are met than in other cases. A reconciliation between these demands, however, also depends on the regulating abilities of the brander. The existence of certain forms of regulation diminishes the risk that an increase in the variety of products leads to a decrease in specificity.

We saw above that the addition of new products to the brand (variety increase) can lead to conceptual inconsistencies, and thus to a loss of specificity. At the same time, however, we found that if adequate forms of

regulation are applied, this risk becomes smaller. The risk is minimized if regulation of product and concept choices takes place a). in relationship to the core concepts, b). by changing the values of the core concepts or c). by performing regulating actions proactively. We will discuss these three points below.

A). If regulation takes place *without a clear relationship to the core concepts*, an increase in new products under the brand name, can easily cause conceptual inconsistencies. Both in the Mars case and the Douwe Egberts case we saw that the regulating actions of the branders did not always have a clear relationship with the core concepts. In the case of Mars, the regulation of new product proposals was guided by other criteria than the core concepts – such as economic norms and opinions of the customers. In the Douwe Egberts case, the core concepts were not the dominant criterion either. New product proposals were evaluated on the basis of a model, which was not directly related to the core concepts (the so called cube model). As a result, a lot of new articles were linked to the brand, while the link to the core concepts was unclear in most cases. The central distinctive subconcepts of some articles contradicted the core concepts ‘togetherness’ and ‘care’, because the core concepts did not play a substantial role in the process of regulation. By performing regulating actions unrelated to the core concepts, an increase in variety led to an increase in conceptual inconsistency and – as a result – an increase in the risk of losing specificity.

However, at one point in time, the Douwe Egberts executives started with reactive regulation related to the core concepts, in answer to the conceptual inconsistencies. The explicit use of the core concepts in regulation led to a proposal to ‘repair’ the conceptual inconsistencies by changing elements in the conceptual structure of the brand. Some of these executives proposed to change the central distinctive subconcepts of the articles (coffees that were characterized as mild, strong, good quality, etcetera) so that they would be consistent with the core concepts (‘togetherness’ and ‘care’). Although these proposals were not accepted, this operation brought back a focus and attention on the core concepts.

In the case of Mars, some form of reactive regulation was proposed as well. The perception of conceptual inconsistencies led to proposals of taking those articles off the market that caused the inconsistencies. These proposals were not put into practice because of the lack of consensus about the core concepts. But, the adoption of these proposals could have led to restoring conceptual consistency again.

B). We found that *changing the core concepts* as a form of regulation can have a positive influence on reconciling the demands of variety production and specificity preservation. In the Douwe Egberts case, we have seen that the executives tried to restore conceptual inconsistencies by changing the core concepts. They proposed to give the core concept 'care' a more prominent role in creating a conceptual link. A change was made with respect to the core concepts in the sense that one concept ('care') was put on the foreground, while the other was made less important. Although this did not resolve all conceptual inconsistencies¹¹¹, it did provide stronger conceptual links between most of the articles and the core concepts.

C). Finally, it was confirmed that especially *proactive regulation* was important for the preservation of a consistent conceptual structure in the case of increased variety pressure. The disadvantage of reactive regulation is that regulation takes place after the damage has been done. Proactive regulation can help to prevent conceptual inconsistencies by anticipation. The Camel Trophy brand is a good example: it did not have to 'repair' conceptual inconsistencies because all new product proposals were developed on the basis of the core concepts. A weaker example of this was shown in the Douwe Egberts case. The executives of the brand did not actually perform proactive regulation, but made plans for possible proactive regulating actions.

In the Camel Trophy case, the brander not only performed proactive regulation with respect to the core concepts Camel Trophy, it also performed regulating actions proactively aimed at changing them. There were two reasons for doing so. The *first* was that, by doing so, the brander anticipated new cultural developments that could make the current brand concepts less relevant. By making anticipatory changes to the core concepts, the brander wanted to prevent a discrepancy to be created between the brand identity and the brand users' most favourable perception of the brand. In other words, this kind of regulation was important for a good relationship between the brand identity and the brand users' perception and adoption of the shared generalized brand concept. The *second* reason for a proactive change in the core concepts was to adapt the core concepts to possible new product or service introductions that were planned for the future. In other words, it could prevent conceptual inconsistencies arising between the core concepts and new products and services in the future.

So, based on our research we can conclude that proactive regulation –

both in relationship to the existing core concepts and by changing them – appears to have a positive influence on the consistency of a conceptual structure. Thus, it can make a positive contribution to preserving the specificity in cases of increasing variety.

Figure 7.2. shows an overview of the conclusions concerning the relationship between regulation and the preservation of specificity. As we can see, the cases show that four forms of regulating actions contribute – in their own way – to the preservation of specificity¹¹².

	Reactive	Proactive
Regulation unrelated to core concepts	No contribution to preserving specificity	No contribution to preserving specificity
Regulation related to core concepts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Restore inconsistencies by changing the central distinctive sub concepts of the articles (Douwe Egberts)- Restore inconsistencies by withdrawing products (Mars)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Prevent inconsistencies by linking new products to core concepts up front (Douwe Egberts / Camel Trophy)- Restore inconsistencies by withdrawing products (Mars)
Regulation based on changing the core concepts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Restore inconsistencies by changing the core concepts (Douwe Egberts)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Prevent inconsistencies by changing core concepts in reaction to planned product introductions (Camel Trophy)

Figure 7.2 Regulating actions and their impact on conceptual consistency

Some final remarks

At the end of this thesis, a few concluding remarks are appropriate. The results discussed in this chapter have shown that our approach – consisting of a theoretical and methodological framework – has made it possible to gain some new insights into a well known problem. Because this problem – as we have pointed out a few times – is already investigated in previous studies, it might be a good idea to stress the specific contribution of our analyses by making a summarizing comparison with these previous studies. The problem at hand – the variety – specificity dilemma – as we noted before has been studied in different studies, of which especially the ‘*extension research*’, the research by Kapferer (1992, 1995) and by Broniarczyk and Alba (1994) have been our most important benchmarks.

In contrast with the *extension research* tradition, we have adopted a

brander's perspective. By doing so, we were able to study the variety-specificity dilemma as a problem of the brander. We could see that rules of consistency apply in dealing with this dilemma. We have seen that there exist several possibilities for the brander to perform operations without a clear perspective of the brand. If he does not obey specific 'rules' pertaining to conceptual consistency, as described in the method and seen in the cases, it becomes unlikely that consumers will evaluate the brand positive after the introduction of new products under its name. In the end, consistent conceptual structures have a positive influence on the ability of consumers to recognize communicative actions of the brander and new products as part of a brand.

We followed Broniarczyk and Alba in their observation that the brander's concept of a brand can have the power to provide a conceptual link that is crucial to minimize the risk of brand dilution when new products are linked to the brand. Unlike *Broniarczyk and Alba (1994)* we did not just identify the power of this link, but we were also able to explain how this power actually works and why some brands do possess this power and others not. We have seen that the causes of brand dilution can be traced back to the nature of the concepts and the characteristics of the conceptual structures involved. Our analyses into brand concepts and their conceptual structures made it possible to uncover – in a detailed way – the determinants of the power of a brand concept to integrate a variety of products and stay specific at the same time.

These analyses not only added general insights into this dilemma that could not be found by Broniarczyk and Alba. That is to say: insights concerning the nature and backgrounds of inconsistencies that could prevent the clear conceptual link brought forward by these authors. These analyses also make it possible for branders to manage the dilemma in a better way. It enables them to identify the weak spots in their conceptual structure and to strengthen the ability to regulate the brander system.

Our analysis followed the observation of Kapferer (1992, 1995) concerning the importance of the brander for the absorption of variety and preservation of specificity. Compared to his arguments, we however, described in greater detail how (and why) the brand concept is weakened. Our method is useful for the identification of the parts that represent a real threat to the brand and of the parts that are crucial to protect the preservation of specificity. Secondly, we have stressed and observed in detail the role of the brander as regulator of the brander's operations. We discovered that the power of a brand to reconcile the ambition of variety

absorption and specificity preservation cannot be explained by the characteristics of a brand concept alone, but in combination with the characteristics of regulating actions. In order to study the brander as regulator, we embedded the role of the brander in a systems theory concerning branding and brand regulation. We were able to identify which kinds of regulation are crucial in maintaining particular conceptual structures and to assess which conceptual structures are likely to occur once particular forms of regulation are performed. It appeared that some forms of regulation are more likely to 'produce' consistent conceptual structures than others. The identification of different forms of regulation and their relationship with particular conceptual structures – to our opinion – adds new insights into variety-specificity dilemma that are not covered by Kapferer in such detail.

Finally, the following remarks could put things somewhat more in perspective. In the first place, everything a brander does is only one part in the development of a branding system. That branding system is a social system that cannot be controlled by the brander. The brander, so we must repeat, does not have the power to determine the development of the branding system. The brand user always has a role in that. This process of connecting the operations of the brander and brand user is the heart of branding and has its own dynamics. It can be boosted by the addition of new variety by the brander and by the brand user. However, its viability in the end depends on the degree to which the brander and brand user are able and willing to orient their own variety of operations to a shared generalized brand concept, and on the degree to which they are able and willing to ascribe each other's operations to the brand. This not only requires orientation towards each other, but foremost an openness and loyalty towards a mutually created point of orientation. The brand is a medium developed and maintained exclusively for the interaction between specific persons and particular organisations. In the end – and this is the second remark we want to make – the development of the medium and the system also depends on the general logic of 'consumer society'. The mediating role of brands and branding in maintaining and developing such a society has often been subject to severe criticism¹¹³. It is hard to foresee how the increasing critical attitude towards the power of global brands could influence the development of individual branding systems. The assessment and study of these individual, organizational and societal influences on brands and branding could also be undertaken with the help of the system theoretical approach we developed in this thesis. It

provides a foundation to analyse these influences not as separate aspects, but in relationship to each other.

Appendix

Questionnaire

1 *Determination of brand identity at the moment.*

1a Core concepts

- What are the most important associations the executive wants to link to the brand?
- What are the most typical associations the executive wants to link to the brand?
- What should remain; which associations should be linked to the brand at any cost?
- Which activities/products are absolutely impossible under the brand? Why?

1b Peripheral supportive subconcepts

- Are there any other – less important – associations that make the brand unique?

1c Development of the brand

- Has there been any development in these associations? To what extent?
- Has something happened that changed the brand dramatically regarding these associations?
- Have major or minor disasters occurred regarding the brand as such?

References used to answer 1a and 1b: A

A Are there certain...

- Product characteristics
- Functional characteristics

- Impressive values (leaving a satisfying feeling with the user)
- Expressive values (enabling to clarify something to another person)
- B In your opinion, are there any typical associations of the brand that refer to:
 - The organisation (culture)?
 - The history of the brand?
 - The city, region or country?
 - The market?
- C How would you describe the stereotypical, ideal brand user?
- D Is the brand's future based on a certain view on the market, the world or an ideal situation?

2 *Investigation of the brand articles.*

- 1 Which products, falling within the area of the executive's responsibility, are linked to the brand?
- 2 Per brand article: what are:
 - the product characteristics?
 - the functional characteristics?
 - the values?
- 3 Who are the competitors of the brand article?
- 4 Central distinctive subconcepts: how does the brand article try to distinguish itself from the competition? Which associations play a part?
- 5 Peripheral supportive subconcepts: which associations are deliberately linked to the brand article, but do not play a role in distinguishing it from competitors?
- 6 What has the brand article in common with competitive brand articles? Or: what are typical associations for the product category?
- 7 Is it the intention of the executive to establish that users of the one brand article also use the other?
- 8 The relation between articles and brand identity:
 - a Is the brand article connected with the core concepts that are important for the brand as a whole and if yes, which?
 - b Is the brand article connected with other, less typical associations of the brand as a whole and if yes, which?
 - c In your opinion: are "own" associations linked to the brand article that are not typical for the brand as a whole? If so, which?

3 *Investigation of the development of the brand articles.*

Per brand article:

- a When was it introduced?
- b What were the motives for the introduction of the brand article?
- c Was it (also) introduced, for instance:
 - to retain/reinforce the market position?
 - to stimulate the sales of other brand articles?
 - to expand the relationship with the customer?
- b Has the brand article changed over the years and if yes, what caused it?
- c Have loyal brand users always been satisfied with the introduction of a new brand article? If not, why did the introduction take place anyway?
- d Has the executive – or others within the company – always been satisfied with the introduction of a certain brand article?
- e Which criteria are being used to determine whether a brand article can or cannot be marketed under the brand name?

4 *Investigation of the relation between the brand, the brand activities (non-product activities) and the company.*

- 1 Why did the company start with the brand activity?
- 2 Why did the company start with brand activity?
- 3 How does the brand activity relate to the brand?
- 4 Regarding desired associations: in what does the brand differ from the brand activity?
- 5 In what do the company efforts for the brand differ from the efforts performed by the company of the brand activity?
- 6 Are there any tensions between the two regarding association patterns?
 - a Which activities could be marketed under the brand name and not under the brand name of the activity and vice versa?
 - b To what extent do the marketing activities of the brand activity impact the activities of the brand?
 - c To what extent does company of the brand allow the company of the brand activity to link new brand articles to the brand name?
 - d How are things arranged from an organizational point of view?

- 5 *Investigation of the regulation of operations by the brand.*
 - 1 To what extent does the desired brand image impact choices with respect to:
 - The production process
 - HR management: hiring, training, and coaching people product development
 - Marketing efforts: advertising/promotion, distribution
 - 2 Explicitly for this purpose: have any guidelines been developed?
 - 3 Does the entire company support the desired brand image or is this awareness only present with certain groups?
 - 4 Is there consensus about the desired brand image and to what extent?
 - 5 The influence of the brand concept on the executives view on customers, competitors and society:
 - a What do all brand users have in common?
 - b What are specifically favourable/threatening developments in:
 - society
 - consumer behaviour
 - the market
 - c Who will be brand's competitors in ten years' time?
 - d Who will be your brand users in ten years' time? e. e. What kind of research is carried out?
 - f In what categories are customers research?
 - 6 To what extent do brand users influence the brand?
 - 7 Has it become more or less?

Secondary material used:

- General brand descriptions about core associations/values
- Marketing plans, briefings regarding introduction new branded articles (positioning/communication)
- Marketing plans, briefings regarding repositioning/changes in brand associations
- Market research (what will be investigated: resulting consumer image)

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Endnotes

- 1 Wolf, M.J. (1999)
- 2 They build their case around explaining the value of coffee. Depending on how one makes a business out of coffee, the product can reflect four economic offerings. The coffee bean is a true commodity, worth nothing more than \$ 1 a pound, which translates to one or two cents a cup. Manufactured and packaged, coffee jumps to between 5 and 25 cents a cup. Offered in a fine restaurant – the product has become part of a service package- customers will pay \$2 or \$5 a cup. When asking for the same cup at cafe Florian at St. Mark's Square in Venice, one has to pay more than \$15 a cup. The experience offered at the square has a positive effect on economic value (1999: 1-2). Experiences – in their opinion – are there to "engage people in a personal, memorable way" (1999: 3).
- 3 For instance, Pine & Gilmore present experiences as a new 'genre of economic output', where people want to pay for the experience that is offered to them. Most of the money made by these 'experiences' is still made by selling products and services. Experiences, in most cases, can be considered as a new way of still selling products and services, but at a higher price.
- 4 Tofler (1970) already paid attention to this new way of creating value when arguing: "Eventually, the experience-makers will form a basic – if not the basic – sector of the economy. We shall become the first culture in history to employ high technology to manufacture that most transient, yet lasting of products: the human experience (1970: 234/ 236-237)."
- 5 (Mayer in: Baudrillard, 1998)
- 6 Baudrillard (1998: ix) does not hesitate to describe the deep impact of consumption as well as the dangers attached to it: "Just as medieval society was balanced on God and the Devil, so ours is balanced on consumption and its denunciation. Though at least around the Devil heresies and black magic sects could organize. Our magic is white. No heresy is possible any longer in a state of affluence. It is the prophylactic whiteness of a saturated society, a society with no history and no dizzying heights, a society with no myth other than itself."

- 7 *Italic by Baudrillard*
- 8 Baudrillard's definition of a brand relates quite well to our definition of a brand as a concept. He defines the brand as a sign, which is a unity of signifier and signified. We consider the brand as a concept, which refers to 'meaning'. In our empirical analysis we will focus on this conceptual dimension of the brand in particular. However, a concept cannot exist without a signifier connected to it. So, although we will focus on the 'meaning' dimension of Baudrillard's 'sign' conception, our definition of the brand is perfectly compatible with that of Baudrillard.
- 9 De Geus (1999) has argued in his book 'The Living Company' that successful companies combine a strong identity with a strong ability to adapt. Although this 'ability to adapt' is not the same as 'the drive to innovate' that is discussed by Collins & Porras, both refer to the need to create a variety of options while maintaining certain principles.
- 10 See also: Sennet (1998)
- 11 See also: Mosmans & van der Vorst (1997, 2000)
- 12 At least, branding systems are not always differentiated like other social systems, for instance organizations or societies. Unlike these, branding systems do not always have clear boundaries. In chapter 2, we will discuss some of these differences. Anyhow, the autopoietic principles by which these social systems develop can be applied to explain branding as well.
- 13 As Luhmann argues: "Das System reflektiert seine eigene Einheit als Bezugspunkt fuer Beobachtungen, als Ordnungsgesichtspunkt fuer ein laufendes Reflektieren und dann empfiehlt es sich, Texte anzufertigen, die eine Vielzahl solcher immer nur ereignishafter und situationsgebundener Selbstbeobachtungen koordinieren. In einfachster Form gibt das System sich einen Namen, eine rigide invariante Bezeichnung, die eben wegen dieser Rigiditaet wiederholt und in unvorsehbar verschiedenen Situationen verwendet werden kann (1997: 880)."
- 14 These 'criteria' are called essential variables.
- 16 Exceptions to this include: Kapferer (1992), Brandmeyer & Deichsel (1999), Franzen & Bouwman (1999) and to a lesser degree Park, Milberg & Lawson (1991)
- 16 Or network of organizations. Each time we mention organisation in the rest of this thesis, we include networks of organizations.
- 17 In case a selection is made against the background of an explicit range of possibilities we can consider it a specific kind of selection, a decision Luhmann (1984: 399).
- 18 Although their approach has extended from commitment to core compe-

- tencies alone to 'commitment to the future' (Prahalad & Hamel, 1994: 122).
- 19 The American sociologist Richard Sennett (1998) has discussed the personal problems modern man is facing due to this struggle between flexibility and the urge to build a stable identity.
 - 20 Although the function of branding is oriented towards solving contingency problems for both the organization and the customer, the creation and maintenance of branding is – generally speaking – of more interest to the organization than to the customer.
 - 21 Although we consider restrict ourselves to customers, we do not exclude other stakeholders from a theoretical point of view. In our empirical analysis however, we will focus on them.
 - 22 In Luhmann's terms, an individual is not a system theoretical term. In systems theory, the distinction between system and environment is crucial. Something we can observe either belongs to a system or to the environment. In the strict sense, an individual is not a system, but exists of several operationally separated systems. It is not correct therefore, to see an individual as only an organic or psychic system. An individual is not just 'living', or just 'thinking', but it means a structural coupling between these systems. Based on that premise, one should not understand an individual or a person as system.
 - 23 One of the few attempts to apply systems theory to branding has been made by Otte (1993). Unlike our view of branding, he considers persons and individuals as elements of a system of brands: "Konsumenten und andere Markenbeteiligten können so als ein vernetztes, dissipatives System erkannt werden (1993: 49)."
 - 24 The branding system differs from other social systems in yet another way than in the more remote character of communication. Societal (sub) systems, like economics, religion or law, are all characterized by societal codes that are crucial to their constitution. The reproduction of law as a societal subsystem for instance takes place by the general code 'legal'/ 'illegal' (Luhmann, 1990). Branding systems lack such a 'general code'.
 - 25 There are few differences between the branding system and a society as a social system. Like in a branding system, communication within a society is also medium mediated and is often performed with personal detachment.
 - 26 Luhmann accepts the idea that intentionality is not a prerequisite for the existence of communication. The prerequisite for communication is the perceived difference by the receiver between 'utterance' and 'information':

"Kommunikation ist zwar, wie schon angedeutet, ohne Mitteilungsabsicht moeglich, wenn es Ego gelingt, eine Differenz von Information und Mitteilung gleichwohl zu beobachten (1994: 208)." Unlike Luhmann, we stress the idea that the difference between utterance and information lies with the receiver, while Luhmann says that it can lie with the sender as well: "Es fehlt daher an Kommunikation, wenn beobachtetes Verhalten nur als Zeichen fuer Eile beobachtbar sein, so wie dunkle Wolken als Zeichen fuer Regen; es kann aber auch als Demonstration von Eile, Beschäftigtsein, Unansprechbarkeit usw. Aufgefasst und mit der Absicht, eine solche Auffassung auszuloesen, auch produziert werden kann (1984: 208-209)." What we would like to stress is that the difference between 'hurry' and 'being busy' as indicated in this quote, must not necessarily be made by the sender. We speak of communication if the receiver perceives the hurry of a passenger as an attempt of him to say he is in a hurry. It is not necessary that the passenger himself intends to say that with his behaviour.

- 27 Meant is: an operation that is ascribed to the brand.
- 28 Compared to Luhmann, Parsons puts less stress on the fact that expectations and structures develop in a process of mutually relating communications. In stead, he stresses the fact that shared expectations are a prerequisite for mutually relating the behaviour of two 'agents'. While Luhmann focuses on the process of how expectations can 'structure' communications, Parsons focuses on the fact that shared expectations are a prerequisite for relating the behaviour of two different actors to each other.
- 29 According to Parsons expectations are not only mediated by culture alone. Beside culture, structure and roles also play an important role.
- 30 In section 2.5. we will discuss the brand as a generalized shared concept more thoroughly.
- 31 The role of the brand will be discussed in greater depth in section 2.5.
- 32 In section 2.5., we will discuss the distinction between knowledge, preference and action in greater depth.
- 33 In paragraph 2.6.2., we will further specify these essential variables of the branding system.
- 34 Vriens (1998: 130) considers the direct relevant environment as being part of the ultrastable system as well. This is possible because he considers the 'system' as a model here. In that interpretation of a 'system' it is allowed to draw system boundaries wherever one likes. We choose to situate this environment outside the ultrastable system for we want to describe the branding system as a real system. A real system is not a model, but repre-

- sents that of which a model is being made. The branding system is a real system. Its boundaries are not arbitrary. As a result, the direct relevant environment cannot be part of the branding system, but exist outside that system.
- 35 As Vriens (1998: 131) argues, the difference between direct relevant and indirect relevant environment is fuzzy. For a more accurate description we refer to Vriens (1998: 136).
- 36 The branding system can be threatened from within as well, that means by the 'brand operations' of the brander or the brand user. This will be discussed in section 2.7.
- 37 The study of the gating mechanisms of different branding systems is a possible very interesting research object. It would include the routine reaction patterns of branding systems to particular kinds of threats. However, this falls outside the realm of this thesis.
- 38 In this paragraph, we will discuss the nature of concepts only superficially. In chapter 3 and 4, we will give a more profound analysis of the nature of concepts and its relation to the brand.
- 39 The notion of brand image is also used in the context of brand identity. In these discussions, brand image most often is situated at the side of the brand user whereas brand identity is being related with the brander: "Image is on the receiver's side (...) Identity is on the sender's side" (e.g. Kapferer, 1992: 37). (See also: v. Riel, 1992: 54) The notion of brand identity will be discussed in section 2.8..
- 40 According to Engel, Blackwell & Miniard (1990: 339) values do not only refer to preference patterns, but also to behavioral and cognitive patterns: 'relatively stable but not completely static, as are beliefs (with cognitive, affective and behavioral components) about what a person should or ought to do (but not always do), both concerning the goals (end state or terminal elements) and the ways of behaving (instrumental components) to obtain goals.'
- 41 The generalized nature of the brand as a concept is reflected by the way people are portrayed in commercials, as important carriers of such concept. The people 'acting' in most commercials play their role in a different way than actors do in a play or film. The play by professional actors is supposed to look or feel real. Most commercials show people acting not 'as real as possible' at all. Their play is oriented towards bringing over generalized patterns. Their behavior is 'unreal', 'false', not with the intention only to look real, but aimed at communicating generalized ideas.
- 42 Luhmann resists the common distinction between process and structure

by arguing that process also has structuring effects (1973: 37).

43 Like the branding system, the brander's system is considered as a social system. The system is reproduced by recursively connected communicative actions.

44 In paragraph 2.7.4., we will deal with the models used by the brand regulator in greater depth.

45 In succession to Kapferer, Aaker also puts the notion of brand identity central to his thinking: 'Brand identity is a unique set of brand associations that the brand strategist aspires to create or maintain (1996: 68).'

46 Another possible reason why the brand identity can be a useful tool for brand management is that it can help to deal with the variety that is created in reaction to the fact that brand users are given more influence on the brander's decisions. As Mitchell indicated: "Marketeers are increasingly seeking to transcend the adversarial buyer/supplier relationship that lies at the heart of their traditional model of the marketplace. They are increasingly seeing customers as partners in a process of wealth creation, and trying to recruit these customers to join them in their particular wealth creating circle, as opposed to joining the wealth creating circles offered by other brands (1997: 3)." If these developments are taken seriously, the brand user is given more influence on the brander's decisions. That means that the brander has to allow more variety in his operations and decisions. Consequently, the concept that is used by the brand regulator for the regulation of the brander's operations, has to allow more variety and more focus on the boundaries of the brand. The brand identity can suit this purpose because of its generalized character.

47 Kapferer (1992: 98 -)

48 Aaker (1995: 92) also considers the brand identity to grasp the essentials of the brand – as they are seen by the brander: 'Core and extended identities organize the identity elements as to their role in representing the essence of a brand.'

49 Other strategic reference points mentioned by Fiegenbaum, Hart & Schendel, that can be considered as forms of self description are corporate identity or strategic intent (1996: 223).

50 Brands, not the brand identity!

51 Since we consider the brander system as a social system, the introduction of a product is also considered as communicative action. Consequently, the introduction of a new product is considered as a new means of communication.

52 Note that these regulating options can be worked out in a reactive (in reac-

- tion to an immediate danger) and proactive way (without the presence of an immediate danger). These possibilities display different ways of reaching and maintaining stability. This distinction will be further explored in chapter 5.
- 53 This phenomenon called the risk of brand dilution has been elaborated by various authors. Franzen (2000), Franzen & Bauman (1999: 295-297), Ries & Trout (1981), Tauber (1981), Farquhar (1993)
- 54 When we refer to 'thing' it does not necessarily be a physical thing. A 'thing' can be 'any thing' in this case.
- 55 In post war science, categorization has been the subject of philosophy (for instance: Wittgenstein, 1953, Quine, 1969 and the contributions in the book by A.W. Moore, 1993), psychology (for instance, Rosch, 1973, Berlin & Kay, 1969, Neisser, 1987) anthropology (Lounsbury, 1964, Dixon, 1982) and linguistics (Jaeger, 1980, Bybee & Moder, 1983; Ellis, 1993).
- 56 In paragraph 3.4.3. we will discuss the outcomes of Rosch's experiments in greater depth.
- 57 Brewer (1993) has indicated that theories about concepts differ as to the type of structure in the world they assume to be imposed on concepts. He identifies 9 different kinds of theories that all differ as to the assumptions they make about the ontological status of concepts. The result is a spectrum of theories. On the one side of the spectrum there are theories that imply a rich ontology and the other side consists of theories that assume that there are only instances in the world that have no intrinsic structure at all: "Some theories make the minimal assumption that some entities are more similar to each other than they are to other entities. Other theories make slightly stronger assumptions about the nature of the similarity relations (e.g. that there is a graded structure). Finally, there are theories that postulate very explicit forms of structure (e.g. natural kinds) and argue that the similarity relations derive from that structure (1993: 496)."
- 58 This pertains to a classical discussion in linguistics and cognitive psychology: the variation issue. Lakoff discusses this (1987: 310-311).
- 59 Lakoff is not always very clear about the difference between a network of related concepts and an Idealized Cognitive Model. Evidence for our interpretation of his notion of Idealized Cognitive Models can be found in particular in the following pages (1987: 68-76; 286)
- 60 Lakoff (1987: 284)
- 61 Lakoff distinguishes a fifth type of ICM, the symbolic ICM. The difference between a symbolic model and the others, is that the others are purely conceptual, they can be characterized independently of the words and mor-

phemes of particular languages: 'When linguistic elements are associated with conceptual elements in ICMs, the result is what we shall call a symbolic ICM (1987: 289).' Lakoff uses the symbolic models to analyse the characteristics of language: '...the meanings of lexical words-words and morphemes- are characterized in terms of cognitive models. The meaning of each lexical item is represented as an element in an ICM. The ICM as a whole is taken as the background against which the word is defined (1987: 289).' Since the linguistic aspects are not part of our object of research, we won't discuss this model.

62 Johnson, M (1987): 'The body in the mind: the bodily basis of meaning, imagination, and reason.'

63 As we will see, for metaphoric models these imaginative devices originate from the principle of mapping concepts from one particular domain onto a conceptual structure from another domain.

64 Except for these five propositional models, Lakoff distinguishes a sixth propositional model, which he calls the proposition. We do not include this model in our description, because his explanation and description of this model is very minimal.

65 In the case of the propositional models, Lakoff consistently speaks of categories instead of concepts. Because we -following Lakoff - still consider concepts to be the elements of ICMs, we will speak of concepts instead of categories while discussing the propositional models.

66 The ability of a brand to draw boundaries beyond existing product or service definitions is related to the conceptual nature of the brand. The complex concepts of which it is constituted give rise to unexpected boundary definitions. The nature of the brand as complex concepts is described later on in this chapter.

67 Another method that implies to see the brand as a category of products as well, is the one designed by Oakenfull, Blair, Gelb & Dacin (2000). This method can be used to measure the fit of certain products with a brand.

68 In literature, there is a distinction being made between line extensions, brand extensions or image transfers (Tauber, 1988 Franzen & Holzhauer, 1987, Riezebos, 1994). The difference between them is based on whether the new products under the brand name belong to a different product category than the old products under the brand name, or not. We will not use this distinction for two reasons:

1. We will not consider the brand as being a subcategory of a category of products.
2. The difference in product classes is not absolute and depends on how one

- wants to categorize products into a category (see also: van der Vorst, 1995). The research we will be analyzing deals with line extensions (new products in the same product class) as brand extensions (new products in a different product class). The difference in itself will not be the focus of our investigation in this section. We will call new products added to an existing brand 'brand extensions', no matter whether they belong to a different product class or not.
- 69 More in particular, the quality perception of the existing products under a brand name has a positive influence on the positive evaluation of the extension: "If the brand is associated with high quality, the extension should benefit; if it is associated with inferior quality, the extension should be harmed (Aaker & Keller, 1990: 29)."
- 70 These studies suggest that if the brand the extension is linked with, is associated with good manufacturing abilities, the extension is more likely to receive a positive evaluation "The other fit measure, transfer, pertains not to how consumer view relationships in product usage, but how consumers view relationships in product manufacturing. Specifically, transfer reflects the perceived ability of any firm operating in the first product class to make a product in the second product class (Aaker & Keller, 1990: 30)."
- 71 It is assumed that if the products of a brand share certain aspects with the extensions, the extension has more chance of getting a positive evaluation. The share of these aspects (called fit in these studies) can refer to functional features. In that case the products of the brand and the extensions share a common need, use or use context: "The first fit measure, complement, indicates the extent to which consumers view two product classes as complements. Products are considered complements if both are consumed jointly to satisfy some particular need (Henderson & Quandt, 1980). The second measure, substitute, is the extent to which consumers view two product classes as substitutes. Substitute products tend to have a common application and use context such that one product can replace the other in usage and satisfy the same needs. Consider Rossignol, which makes downhill skis. A complementary extension might be Rossignol ski clothing; a substitute extension might be Rossignol cross-country skis or ice-skates (Aaker & Keller, 1990: 30)."
- 72 They concluded that unsuccessful extensions did not cause consumers to evaluate the family brand name any differently than they had before learning about the brand extension (Romeo, 1991) or any differently than the control group that had not received the extensions information (Keller & Aaker, 1992).

- 73 'As both authors argue: "In this paper, we examine the issue of brand name dilution from a different perspective than the studies described above. Specifically, we investigate whether brand extension failures can cause 'dilution' of specific attribute beliefs that consumers have come to hold about established brand names?, rather than 'dilution' of the global effect associated with an established brand name emphasized in previous research. When brand names are extended to new products, it is often the specific attribute association that consumers identify with the brand name that are being transferred and that form the basis for positioning the new product in the market (Loken & John, 1993: 72)."
- 74 They relate the evaluation of extension to the so called 'ownership effect': people who already own products of the brand are more favourable to extensions of the brand than people that do not already own products of the brand: "An 'ownership effect' is proposed whereby owners have more favourable responses than non-owners to the brand's extensions (Kirmani, Sood & Bridges, 1999: 88)."
- 75 Other authors who have embraced an approach in which the brand is more seen as providing a source of equivalence than the category of products are Broniarczyk & Alba. They do not consider the brand as a concept that provides a source of equivalence. Instead, they speak of brand specific associations:.. "a brand-specific association is defined simply as an attribute or benefit that differentiates a brand from competing brands. For example, Apple computer is associated with user friendliness, but this association is not strongly associated with other computer brands or with the product class as a whole (1994:215)." The role that these brand specific associations play is comparable with the role a brand concept plays by providing a source of equivalence: they provide a connection between products: "We argue that there is no necessary reason to expect that consumers to make judgments of overall similarity between a brand's original category and an extension category or that, if judgments are made, similarity will be based on total feature overlap or occur at the product class level. In stead, a single brand association may provide a persuasive connection between the brand and an otherwise dissimilar extension category (1994:215)."
- 76 In branding literature, these different levels are named differently (for instance: Kapferer (1992: 149-166), Aaker (1997: 243), Aaker & Joachimstiller (2000) or Hill & Lederer (2001).
- 77 In this example of Apple, the central distinctive subconcepts and the core concepts (at the level of the identity concept) are the same. As we will see, does not necessarily have to be the case. In a lot of cases the (sub)concepts

- that exist at the level of the article concepts as central distinctive subconcepts are different from the core concepts.
- 78 The methods can also be applied for analyzing the brand as it is perceived by the brand user. Since we focus on the brander, we have restricted ourselves to analysing the brand identity.
- 79 Kotler, 2002
- 80 From a competitive point of view, metaphorical projection would be most powerful for a brand if the product aspects which are related to the source domain, were very distinctive (if they were not already claimed by any other brand).
- 81 As we discussed in the previous section, the central distinctive subconcepts are the – strategically – most important subconcepts of the article concepts because they have to distinguish the articles from competitors and other articles within the portfolio of the brander.
- 82 This shows that he is well able to deal with the variety-specificity dilemma.
- 83 The investigation of brand associations has been subject to scientific discussion. One of the questions is how to find clever ways to investigate what people think about a brand, without asking them directly. For instance, one could use all kinds of projective techniques to get a picture of what people really think of a brand. In our research, we are not interested in what executives 'really think of the brand', but in what explicit concepts they use in managing them. That is why direct investigation was considered as a valid way of investigation.
- 84 These ingredients (like 'chocolate') are peripheral concepts. They are considered as less central to the brand according to the executives, but they support the core concept of 'eating experience'. Apart from 'ingredients', there are more concepts that are less important for the definition of the brand. As the research has shown however, none of the concepts played an important role in the conceptual structure of the article concepts. That is why we won't describe these peripheral supportive concepts in great depth. They are discussed in appendix 1..
- 85 In the previous paragraph we characterized the relationship between the Mars minis and Mars core concepts by similarity link. Although there are reasons to believe that the "light eat" concept as central distinctive subconcept of the Mars minis contradicts with the "energy" concept, we posed that the "young" target group concept of the mini 's justifies the small portion to stay still associated with energy. However, looking at the "foot-print" classification by Mars, one can see that for a part the minis are also targeted for adults. In that case the "justification" assertion does not hold

and the same could be said for the minis: contradicting with the "energy category" of the Mars identity. However, while the mini's are not explicitly positioned as "indulgence" we cannot conclude that it contradicts with the Mars core concepts.

- 86 As we saw in the previous section, the Ice Cream snack as well as the Ice cream stick both provide refreshment. This can be seen as a transformation of 'energy'. Hence, we concluded that there was a transformation link. According to some of the Mars executives however, there is a mismatch between the Mars Ice Cream snack and Mars Ice Cream Stick on the one hand and the core concept 'energy' on the other:

"Mars ice cream snack is a very faithful reproduction of size, formats and it certainly doesn't deliver against the value positioning. Sure it is seen as something when I need refreshment, rather than I feel hungry and need energy. I think there is truly a mismatch".

And: "The eating of an ice cream has nothing to do with energy. " And: "The positioning of the Mars ice cream has nothing to do with energy. It is more refreshment but still based on chocolate and caramel." Although some of the executives perceive a mismatch, this cannot be caused by a contradiction between 'refreshment' and 'energy'. From a conceptual point of view they do not have to be contradictory. However, a possible contradiction can be rooted in the fact that ice creams are considered as 'indulgence' products, not so much as energy products. Although we cannot find direct proof of that, it is possible that the perceived mismatch can be explained by the contradiction between 'indulgence' and 'energy'.

- 87 Sources: Interviews with executives. De koffiewereld van Douwe Egberts. FHV /BBDO, 1990

- 88 De koffiewereld van Douwe Egberts (FHV /BBDO, 1990: 13)

- 89 Source: 'De koffiewereld van Douwe Egberts: Samen zorgen we voor de lekkerste koffie'. FHV/BBDO, 1990

- 90 The reason why the peripheral supportive concepts are mentioned is because they display concepts that play an important role in understanding the working of the core concepts as particular frame of reference.

- 91 The brand's relationship refers to a description of the brand in terms of the relationship it symbolizes.

- 92 The brand's personality in the brand identity prism of Kapferer refers to a description of the brand in terms of personality traits.

- 93 Based on the concepts, new events were even organized, like the Camel Trophy Experience. As one of the executives argues: With the Camel Trophy Experience you experience the "Camel Trophy" feeling. That brings it even closer."

- 94 Camel Trophy and Camel Collection fall under the responsibility of WBI, World-wide brands Incorporated. Camel Trophy has products (clothing, boots, watches, bags) which are more survival oriented, while Camel Collection has products focussed on casual clothing. The cigarette brand Camel is the responsibility of Reynolds Tabacco.
- 95 If we use the word 'brand' it will be considered as a generalized concept shared somehow by the brander and the brand user.
- 96 The brander system refers to one of the two 'actors' – representing an organization – which operations can contribute to the branding system. The brander system as organization is considered as a social system as well.
- 97 For the investigation of the regulation of the brander system, we have focused on one essential variable in particular: the need to keep the operations of the brander in line with a specific brand identity. The other two essential variables – the fact that the brand identity must match the generalized brand concept and the positive reaction of the brand user to the operations of the brander – are also discussed, but only in relationship to the maintenance of that first essential variable. Furthermore, the theory we developed could give rise to new research projects. The dynamics of the branding system, the brander system and brand users can be explored further, both theoretically and empirically. The dynamics of the branding system is especially worthwhile investigating because branding has always been studied from either a brander or a brand user perspective. The investigation of the branding system – as theoretically based in chapter 2 – is a concept that can provoke research that goes beyond that. Especially notions like the process and structure of the branding system seem worthwhile exploring. The brander system is an interesting starting point for further investigation because this notion is based on the idea that organisations can be managed in order to contribute to the branding system. More in particular, system theoretical notions on regulation can be explored further to gain insight in the way branders can make a contribution to the branding system by regulating their own operations.
- 99 This central case of 'mother' includes a mother who is and always will be female, and who gave birth to a child, supplied her half of the child's genes, nurtured the child, is married to the father, is one generation older than the child, and is the child's legal guardian (Lakoff, 1987: 83).
- 100 The core concepts and the article concepts are understood as a structured conceptual whole that is 'hold together' by various links.
- 101 A risk can be e.g. a product proposal or brand user's preference that does not fit with the brand identity

- 102 Not all distinctions we made in the methodological framework were made
by the branders themselves. Although the executives had an idea of the
subconcepts both at the level of the brand identity and the brand articles,
the relationship between the core concepts and the article concepts was not
always recognized explicitly by the branders. In the cases of Mars and
Douwe Egberts, this relationship only became an issue when there was a
problem, i.e. when there were inconsistencies between the core concepts
and the article concepts. The distinction we made between different forms
of regulating actions was also not explicitly made by the branders them-
selves. As we will see at the end of this section, the fact that these distinc-
tions were not made explicitly by them, made it possible to expose weak
spots in the regulation of the brander system that remained unnoticed by
some branders.
- 103 These reasons were mainly based on the fact that their current factories
produced coffee.
- 104 In the next section, we will explain this influence of inconsistencies be-
tween core concepts on the risk to lose specificity in greater depth.
- 105 Aaker & Keller, 1990; Sunde & Brodie; 993; Reddy, Holak and Bhat, 1994;
Bottomley & Doyle, 1996; Keller & Aaker, 1997; Park, Milsberg & Lawson,
1991
- 106 Keller & Aaker, 1991; Romeo, 1992 Loken & John, 1993 John, Loken &
Joiner, 1998; Kirmani, Sood & Bridges, 1999
- 107 As we have seen, the third essential variable refers to the fact that the bran-
der must ensure that his concept of the brand – the brand identity – is in
line with the generalized brand concept.
- 108 As discussed, the variety of products was not actually linked to the brand,
but the executives did bring forward that these would fit the brand.
- 109 Keller & Aaker, 1991; Romeo, 1992; Loken & John, 1993; John, Loken &
Joiner, 1998; Kirmani, Sood & Bridges, 1999
- 110 See also figure 7.1.
- 111 As we saw in our discussion about the inconsistencies in the conceptual
structure, the other core concepts were still considered as important. Hence,
the inconsistencies between the central distinctive subconcepts of the arti-
cles and the core concept 'togetherness' still existed.
- 112 In the first section of this chapter, we have argued that the empirical inves-
tigation is focused on one essential variable; the ability to keep the opera-
tions of the brand in line with the brand identity. In our empirical investi-
gation, we have also come across ways in which the branders tried to keep
the other two essential variables via performing regulating actions. In the

Mars case for instance, the positive reaction of the brand user (one of the other essential variables) to product proposals was an important criterion in the process of regulation. In the Camel Trophy case as well as the Mars case, we discovered that the tracking of how brand users think of the brand is important in the regulation process as well. This can be seen as a way of keeping the third essential variable: the correspondence between the brand identity and the generalized brand concept. If we combine these insight with figure 7, we can conclude that the regulation to keep the first essential variable (positive reaction of the brand user) can be placed in the first row; regulation to keep the second essential variable (keeping the operations of the brander in line with the brand identity) can be placed at the second and third row; and regulation to keep the third essential variable (the relationship between the brand identity and the shared generalized brand concept) can be placed in the third row.

113 Naomi Klein (2000); Norena Hertz (2002).

114 Loken & Roedder (1993), Dacin & Smith (1993), Broniarzcyk & Alba (1994).

Samenvatting

Een veelgehoord verwijt van de marketingpraktijk aan de academische wereld is dat de laatste zich alleen maar met theorie bezighoudt. Wie de stroom aan publicaties over merken beschouwt, kan evengoed het tegendeel beweren. De wetenschappelijke literatuur bestaat voor het overgrote deel uit empirische studies naar deelaspecten van merkenbeleid. Coherente theorieën over het wezen van een merk zijn schaars.

In het eerste deel van dit proefschrift wordt een algemene theorie over merken gepresenteerd. Deze theorie vormt de basis voor de onderzoeksvraag die ingaat op een fundamenteel dilemma waarmee merkenbouwers te maken hebben, namelijk het omgaan met variëteit en specificiteit. Om dit dilemma te onderzoeken is een onderzoeksinstrument ontwikkeld, waarmee het mogelijk is om op een nieuwe manier onderzoek te doen naar merken. Het laatste gedeelte van het proefschrift wordt dit onderzoeksinstrument getest en de onderzoeksvraag beantwoord door middel van empirisch onderzoek.

In deze samenvatting zullen we de theorie, het onderzoeksinstrument en de resultaten van het empirisch onderzoek achtereenvolgens behandelen.

De theorie

In onze opvatting dankt het merk zijn populariteit aan het feit dat 'kiezen' voor de moderne mens en organisatie steeds problematischer is geworden. Beide worden met meer alternatieven geconfronteerd en ook de mechanismen die helpen om keuzes te maken (familie of religie in het geval van mensen, organisatiestructuren of machines in het geval van organisaties) staan onder druk.

Merkenbouw – in dit proefschrift 'branding' genoemd – kan behulpzaam zijn bij het keuzeproces van een organisatie en een mens door het keuzeproces van de een af te stemmen op dat van de ander. De kracht van branding is dat door deze wederzijdse afstemming de gedragingen (ope-

raties) van een organisatie en stakeholders van die organisatie aan elkaar gerelateerd kunnen worden. Er is sprake van branding als de reproductie van deze operaties op een gestructureerde manier verloopt en gebaseerd is op een algemeen concept – het merk.

Branding floreert in een Westerse samenleving waarin – commerciële – symbolen een steeds prominentere rol spelen. De Franse socioloog Baudrillard beschreef al in de jaren zestig de kracht van het merk. Volgens hem gaat het bij de consumptie van goederen niet zozeer om hun objectieve gebruiksfunctie, maar vooral om hun symbolische functie. Consumptie is niet het louter uitwisselen van goederen, maar draait om de reproductie van symbolen.

We beschouwen branding – in lijn met deze opvatting – als een proces dat niet zozeer draait om de uitwisseling van producten en diensten, maar om de communicatieve werking van handelen. Om die werking beter te kunnen doorgronden hebben we aansluiting gezocht bij de moderne systeemtheorie van Luhmann. In navolging van zijn theorie over sociale systemen, wordt in dit proefschrift ook branding als sociaal systeem gezien. De elementen van een dergelijk ‘merksysteem’ zijn niet consumenten, producten of organisaties maar communicatieve handelingen (‘communicaties’ in Luhmann’s termen). Branding als sociaal systeem is een systeem van communicatieve handelingen van merkgebruikers en een merkenbouwer (organisatie). Het systeem bestaat uit handelingen van beide die voortdurend naar elkaar verwijzen. Het organiserend principe is gebaseerd op zelfreferentie. Doordat communicatieve handelingen van een merkgebruiker en merkenbouwer voortdurend naar elkaar verwijzen en ‘in elkaar grijpen’, ontstaat een patroon van naar zichzelf verwijzende operaties. Dat patroon noemen we een merksysteem. Dit systeem kan bestaan door reproductie van zijn eigen elementen. Het reproduceert zichzelf doordat handelingen van de twee partijen weer nieuwe handelingen voortbrengen die verwijzen naar eerdere handelingen. Dit zelforganiserend principe wordt in de systeemtheorie ook wel ‘auto-poiesis’ genoemd.

Maar kunnen we een operatie van een organisatie of een mens nu beschouwen als een operatie die tot het merksysteem behoort? Een operatie van een merkenbouwer maakt deel uit van het merksysteem als het door een merkgebruiker wordt gepercipieerd als een merkoperatie (operatie die uit naam van het merk plaatsvindt). Andersom geldt hetzelfde. Een operatie van een merkgebruiker is pas een merkoperatie wanneer die door de merkenbouwer aan het merk wordt toegeschreven. Het beschou-

wen van een handeling als merkoperatie wordt dus niet bepaald door het doel dat iemand heeft met die handeling. Een reclamecampagne die niet door een merkgebruiker aan het merk wordt toegeschreven is geen merkoperatie – ook al was dat wel het doel van de merkenbouwer.

Dit verklaart dat een merksysteem nooit eenzijdig kan worden gecontroleerd door een van de twee partijen. Immers, de ene partij kan wel tot doel hebben een bepaalde merkoperatie uit te voeren, maar het is de andere partij die bepaalt of die operatie wel een merkoperatie is of niet. We noemen het merksysteem ook wel een 'emergent systeem': het bestaan ervan kan niet worden verklaard uit de afzonderlijke intenties van merkenbouwer of merkgebruiker. Het is een patroon dat bestaat uit recursieve operaties van merkenbouwer en merkgebruiker. Om de werking van een merksysteem nog beter te begrijpen is gebruikgemaakt van Ashby's theorie over cybernetica. Uitgaande van zijn opvattingen, kunnen we het merksysteem ook typeren als een ultrastabiel systeem. Dat is een systeem dat zichzelf reguleert door zijn operaties (communicatieve handelingen) binnen bepaalde grenzen te houden. Zolang die operaties binnen die grenzen worden gehouden is het bestaan van het systeem zeker gesteld. Worden die grenzen overschreden, dan loopt het voortbestaan van dat systeem gevaar. Die grenzen worden bepaald door de zogenaamde essentiële variabelen. Beschouwen we de mens als systeem, dan zouden we bijvoorbeeld bloeddruk als essentiële variabele kunnen zien. We kunnen de mens definiëren als een systeem van wie het voortbestaan afhankelijk is van het feit of zijn bloeddruk binnen bepaalde grenzen blijft. Voor een mens is dat snel te begrijpen, maar wat bepaalt het voortbestaan van een merksysteem?

De eerste voorwaarde voor bestaan (essentiële variabele) vormt het feit dat de ene operatie van het merksysteem naar de andere verwijst en aanleiding is voor een nieuwe operatie. Dit noemen we een *proces* van naar elkaar verwijzende operaties. Merkenbouwers zoeken naar allerlei methoden om een dergelijk proces te institutionaliseren, bijvoorbeeld door het gebruik van 'loyalty programma's'. Hoeveel operaties met elkaar in een proces verbonden moeten zijn om een merk nog een merk te noemen, is afhankelijk van elk individueel merk. Net zoals de ene mens eerder zal bezwijken onder een bepaalde bloeddruk dan de ander.

De tweede essentiële variabele is *structuur*. Dit zijn de verwachtingen ten aanzien van toekomstige operaties die zijn gewekt door eerdere operaties. Om als merksysteem levensvatbaar te zijn, moeten er voldoende operaties zijn die een bepaalde kritische massa aan verwachtingen wek-

ken ten aanzien van toekomstige operaties.

De derde essentiële variabele is een gedeeld gegeneraliseerd concept – ofwel *merkconcept* – genoemd. Een merksysteem is niet levensvatbaar zonder het bestaan van een gedeelde merkopvatting. Doordat merkenbouwer en merkgebruiker hun operaties richten naar een gedeelde merkopvatting, kan er een merksysteem ontstaan dat communicatieve handelingen reproduceert die typisch zijn voor een merk. Het merkconcept is dus sturend voor deze operaties. Tegelijkertijd wordt dat merkconcept geconstrueerd en bevestigd door de operaties van merkenbouwer en merkgebruiker. Het merk is er dus door en voor de operaties.

Met behulp van de cybernetica is het mogelijk gebleken om de werking van een merksysteem verder te analyseren. Om de handeling binnen de grenzen te houden die door de essentiële variabelen zijn gedefinieerd, moet het systeem regulerende acties uitvoeren. Gevaren kunnen daarbij niet eenzijdig door de merkenbouwer of de merkgebruiker worden afgewend. Ze worden door het systeem – de onderling verbonden communicatieve handelingen van beide – zelf uitgevoerd.

Hoewel de macht van de merkenbouwer en merkgebruiker afzonderlijk dus beperkt is, heeft de eerste over het algemeen meer belang bij het voortbestaan van een merksysteem dan de tweede. Hij kan invloed uitoefenen op dat merksysteem door zijn eigen operaties ook op een bepaalde manier te reguleren. We noemen dit de regulering van het ‘brander systeem’. Dat is ook een sociaal systeem dat bestaat uit de wederzijds gerelateerde communicatieve handelingen van de merkenbouwer (‘brander’) voorzover ze relevant zijn (of geacht worden) voor de reproductie van het merksysteem. Net als het merksysteem is het voortbestaan van het brander systeem afhankelijk van het al dan niet overschrijden van de essentiële variabelen.

De essentiële variabelen van het brander systeem zijn – logischerwijs – verbonden met die van het merksysteem. Het merksysteem kan alleen processen en structuren hebben als er door de merkgebruiker positief wordt gereageerd op de operaties van de brander. Zonder die positieve reactie is ‘verknoping’ van operaties in processen en structuren immers niet mogelijk. Dus: het voortbestaan van het brander systeem wordt op de eerste plaats bepaald door een positieve reactie van de merkgebruiker. De tweede essentiële variabele van het brander systeem is de voorwaarde dat de operaties van de brander in lijn liggen met zijn interpretatie van het gedeelde gegeneraliseerd merkconcept, genaamd de merkidentiteit. Het bestaan van een gegeneraliseerd merkconcept kan alleen worden vei-

liggesteld als de brander zijn operaties ook richt naar die merkidentiteit. Nu kan het zo zijn dat de operaties van de merkenbouwer volledig uitdrukking geven aan zijn eigen interpretatie van het gedeelde merkconcept (de merkidentiteit). Maar dat betekent nog niet dat dit aan de verwachtingen van de merkgebruiker voldoet. Daarom is de laatste essentiële variabele dat deze merkidentiteit sterk gerelateerd is aan het gedeelde gegeneraliseerde merkconcept.

Het voortbestaan van het merksysteem kan positief worden beïnvloed doordat de brander zijn operaties zodanig reguleert dat ze in lijn liggen met bovengenoemde essentiële variabelen. Dat is al moeilijk genoeg in normale situaties, maar het wordt hem steeds moeilijker gemaakt. Immers, hij wordt in toenemende mate geconfronteerd met verzoeken om meer activiteiten (meer producten en diensten) bij het merk onder te brengen. Unilever besloot onlangs zijn merkenportfolio terug te brengen van 1600 naar 400 merken. Het is een trend dat minder merken meer producten en diensten moeten dragen. Vanuit de eis dat deze in lijn liggen met een bepaalde merkidentiteit (zie de tweede essentiële variabele) ontstaat er druk om deze variëteit in het merk onder te brengen. Er vindt zogezegd verbreding van het merk plaats en dat brengt risico's met zich mee. Merkverbreding kan de betekenis van een merk namelijk minder specifiek maken. Ziehier het dilemma waar merkenbouwers mee worstelen: hoe zorg ik ervoor dat een merk een grote variëteit aan producten kan dragen zonder dat de betekenis ervan minder specifiek wordt? Dit dilemma vormt het hoofdonderwerp van het empirisch onderzoek. Om antwoorden te krijgen op deze vraag is ervoor gekozen zelf een onderzoeksinstrument te ontwerpen.

Het onderzoeksinstrument

De onderzoeksvraag van dit proefschrift luidt: hoe kunnen de verschillen tussen branders worden verklaard als het gaat om hun vermogen om een specifieke merkidentiteit te handhaven bij toenemende druk om een grotere variëteit aan producten aan het merk te verbinden? Meer specifiek hebben we gekeken naar verschillen tussen branders in termen van:

- A de mate waarin hun merkidentiteit een variëteit aan producten kan 'absorberen';
- B de mate waarin hun merkidentiteit het risico loopt minder specifiek te worden door de verbinding met meer producten;

- C de manier waarop branders regulerende acties hebben uitgevoerd naar aanleiding van een vergrote druk om meer producten aan de merkidentiteit te verbinden.

Om inzicht te kunnen krijgen in deze onderzoeksvraag hebben we een onderzoeksinstrument ontwikkeld dat voortbouwt op bovenstaande algemene theorie over merken. Voor de eerste twee onderdelen (A en B) moest dit instrumentarium het mogelijk maken om de conceptuele structuur van de merkidentiteit te onderzoeken.

De conceptuele structuur van een merkidentiteit is een aspect van de merkidentiteit dat onderbelicht is geweest in de literatuur over merken. Dat heeft te maken met de opvatting over merken die zowel in de praktijk van merkenbouw als in de wetenschappelijke wereld de boventoon voert. Merken worden over het algemeen beschouwd als onderdeel van een categorie: je hebt tandpastamerken, bankmerken, automerken, etc. Het merk is in die opvatting feitelijk een subcategorie van een grotere productcategorie (tandpasta's, banken, auto's). De Amerikaanse onderzoeker Boush was de eerste die het merk als een categorie op zichzelf heeft beschouwd. Het merk Sony is een categorie van verschillende producten: televisies, radio's, hifisets, walkmans, etc. Ze maken allemaal deel uit van de categorie Sony-producten. In dit onderzoek gaan we nog een stap verder. Om te kunnen onderzoeken hoe het komt dat een merkidentiteit een variëteit aan producten aan zich kan verbinden, hebben we meer nodig dan de feitelijk constatering dat een merk een categorie producten kan voorstellen. We moeten dan weten wat het organiserende principe is dat het mogelijk maakt dat we die producten beschouwen als 'Sony-producten'. Anders gesteld: om te weten wat de variëteit aan producten is die Sony kan absorberen, moeten we inzicht hebben in datgene wat de grenzen van de categorie Sony-producten bepaalt.

Op basis van het werk van de Amerikaans cognitief psycholoog en linguïst Lakoff hebben we geconcludeerd dat daarvoor een analyse van het concept nodig is. In lijn met zijn theorie stellen we dat de grenzen van een categorie worden bepaald door de regels die voortvloeien uit het concept dat met die categorie correspondeert. Een merkidentiteit kan gezien worden als een complex concept. Dat betekent een concept dat bestaat uit verschillende subconcepten. De mate waarin een dergelijk concept een variëteit aan producten aan zich kan verbinden (onderdeel A) hebben we geoperationaliseerd naar 'het categorisatievermogen' van het concept. In navolging van Lakoff, hebben we gesteld dat dit vermogen afhankelijk is

van de structuur van het concept. Anders gesteld: de mate waarin een concept een meer of minder ruime categorie producten kan 'absorberen' is afhankelijk van de manier waarop dat concept is verbonden met andere subconcepten. We onderscheiden twee niveau's in de conceptuele structuur: het niveau van de merkidentiteit (het deel dat variëteit moet absorberen en tegelijkertijd specifiek moet blijven) en het niveau van de merkartikelen (dat de feitelijke variëteit vertegenwoordigt). Het niveau van de merkidentiteit bestaat uit concepten die strategisch van het grootste belang zijn (de zogenaamde kernconcepten) en de concepten die daaraan ondersteunend zijn (perifere ondersteunende subconcepten). Het niveau van de merkartikelen bestaat uit dezelfde indeling, genaamd respectievelijk de centraal onderscheidende subconcepten en de perifere ondersteunende subconcepten.

Inzicht in het absorberende vermogen van de merkidentiteit kan worden verkregen door de relaties tussen de bovenstaande subconcepten te analyseren. Dat begint bij het identificeren van de kernconcepten. Daarvan wordt de inhoud geanalyseerd. Vervolgens worden de relaties tussen deze kernconcepten en de centraal onderscheidende subconcepten van de merkartikelen getypeerd. Dit gebeurt aan de hand van zogenaamde Idealised Cognitive Models (ICM's). Op basis van de theorie van Lakoff hebben we gesteld dat de kernconcepten op drie manieren een referentiekader kunnen vormen voor de variëteit aan producten.

De eerste manier is door middel van een taxonomisch referentiekader. Dat betekent een categorie aan producten definiëren (bijvoorbeeld 'chocoladeproducten') op basis van producteigenschappen die door alle individuele producten worden gedeeld (de artikelen zijn variaties op een chocoladeproduct). In het geval van een taxonomisch referentiekader delen de artikelen alle producteigenschappen die door de kernconcepten worden vertegenwoordigd.

Bij het tweede referentiekader – het 'kenmerkend referentiekader' – vertegenwoordigen de kernconcepten een of meerdere opvallende kenmerken die door de artikelen worden gedeeld. Deze kenmerken zijn niet louter producteigenschappen, maar kunnen ook eigenschappen zijn die de functionele (gebruiks)consequenties van producten duiden. Denk bijvoorbeeld aan een automerk waarvan het kernconcept 'veilig' is; een eigenschap die door alle producten kan worden gedeeld. Van auto tot kleding.

Het laatste type referentiekader betreft het metaforische referentiekader. Hier behoren de kernconcepten tot een ander domein dan het pro-

ductdomein. Denk aan een merk verzorgingsproducten dat 'liefde en veiligheid' als kernconcepten heeft. Deze concepten behoren tot een ander domein dan dat van de producten. De relatie tussen de kernconcepten en de artikelen is metaforisch.

We verwachtten dat deze verschillende referentiekaders verschillende consequenties zullen hebben voor het categorisatievermogen van de merkidentiteit. Anders gesteld, dat het ene referentiekader een grotere variëteit aan producten mogelijk maakt dan het andere.

Inzicht in onderdeel B (het risico dat de merkidentiteit aan specificiteit zou inboeten) kan ook worden verkregen door een analyse van de conceptuele structuur. Deze analyse is gebaseerd op het vinden van conceptuele inconsistenties tussen de verschillende subconcepten. Op basis van eerder uitgevoerd onderzoek¹¹⁴ hebben we gesteld dat hoe meer inconsistenties er konden worden gevonden, des te groter het risico op verlies van specificiteit. Binnen het onderzoeksinstrument wordt onderscheid gemaakt tussen de inconsistenties tussen de kernconcepten onderling en die tussen de kernconcepten en de centraal onderscheidende subconcepten. De laatste relatie kan worden getypeerd aan de hand van vier soorten relaties: de instance link, de similarity link, de transformational link en de contradiction link. Het risico dat de merkidentiteit zijn specificiteit verliest is groter naarmate er meer en grotere inconsistenties zijn tussen zijn subconcepten (kernconcepten) en de centraal onderscheidende subconcepten van de merkartikelen. Dit is meer het geval bij een relatie die kan worden getypeerd als een transformational link of een contradiction link, dan wanneer er sprake is van een similarity link of een instance link.

Voor onderzoek naar het laatste onderdeel (C), was een analyse van de regulerende acties van de brander noodzakelijk. In het instrumentarium wordt een onderscheid gemaakt tussen verschillende soorten regulerende acties. We onderscheiden allereerst proactieve regulering (regulering voordat een risico zich voordoet) en reactieve regulering (regulering als een risico zich eenmaal heeft voorgedaan). Op de tweede plaats maken we onderscheid tussen reguleringsvormen waarin de kernconcepten niet werden gebruikt, waarin kernconcepten wel werden gebruikt of waarin de kernconcepten zelfs werden veranderd. De analyse van de regulerende acties aan de hand van deze onderscheidingen moest een dieper inzicht geven in het ontstaan van en het omgaan met een bepaalde conceptuele structuur.

Tot zover de theorie en het onderzoeksinstrument. Het laatste gedeelte van dit proefschrift betrof het uitvoeren van empirisch onderzoek op basis van bovenstaand onderzoeksinstrument. Het onderzoek bestond uit drie casestudy's bij ondernemingen die allen te maken hebben gehad met een druk om meerdere verschillende producten aan hun merk te verbinden. Het ging om de merken Douwe Egberts, Mars en Camel Trophy.

Het onderzoek

Het empirisch onderzoek diende twee doelen. Op de eerste plaats was het een manier om het onderzoeksinstrument te testen. Ten tweede moest het de onderzoeksvraag beantwoorden.

Wat het eerste punt betreft: het onderzoeksinstrument heeft de test goed doorstaan. De onderscheidingen die in het instrument naar voren zijn gebracht konden goed worden toegepast op de praktijk. In alle cases bleek het mogelijk de merkidentiteit op te delen in verschillende subconcepten en ook konden de relaties daartussen worden vastgesteld. Uit het gedrag van de merkenbouwer was het daarnaast mogelijk de verschillende regulerende acties af te leiden.

We vonden dat het gebruik van verschillende soorten referentiekaders kon worden gerelateerd aan een verschil in variëteit aan producten. Zo bleek dat het gebruik van het ene referentiekader door een merkenbouwer leidde tot een vernauwing van het productaanbod, terwijl het gebruik van een ander referentiekader duidelijk in verband kon worden gebracht met een bereidheid een grote variëteit aan producten aan het merk te verbinden. Vervolgens kon het verschil in risico op specificiteitsverlies worden gerelateerd aan inconsistenties tussen kernconcepten en inconsistenties tussen kernconcepten en de centraal onderscheidende subconcepten van de artikelen. In het geval van Camel Trophy bijvoorbeeld voorkwam de sterke relatie tussen kernconcepten dat de conceptuele structuur van het merk in losstaande onderdelen uit elkaar kon vallen. Daar waar we relatief veel instance links en similarity links konden vinden tussen de kernconcepten en de centraal onderscheidende subconcepten van de artikelen, werd de specifieke betekenis van de kernconcepten op een eenduidige manier uitgedragen. Het risico dat de introductie van nieuwe producten leidde tot een verlies van specifieke betekenis van de merkidentiteit kon daardoor worden verminderd. Ten slotte hebben we ook relaties tussen de conceptuele structuur en regulerende acties onderzocht. Enerzijds zagen we dat sommige regulerende acties de kans op conceptuele inconsistenties vergrootten, terwijl andere regulerende ac-

ties de kans op dergelijke inconsistenties juist verkleinden. Merkenbouwers die zich toelieden op reactieve regulering die ook nog eens niet gerelateerd was aan de kernconcepten, hadden een grotere kans op inconsistenties in hun conceptuele structuur. Anderzijds zagen we ook dat specifieke conceptuele structuren leidden tot bepaalde regulerende acties. Het feit dat merken als Mars of Douwe Egberts reactief regulerende acties uitvoerden, was rechtsreeks terug te voeren op het besef van het bestaan van conceptuele inconsistenties. In het geval van Douwe Egberts werden deze inconsistenties zelfs expliciet als probleem ervaren en gaven zij aanleiding om proactief te reguleren.

Het tweede doel van het empirisch onderzoek was om ook daadwerkelijk nieuwe inzichten te bieden in de problematiek zoals door de onderzoeksvraag geduid. We hebben ontdekt dat er drie zaken zijn die op een positieve manier bijdragen aan het verenigen van de twee potentieel tegenstrijdige ambities: namelijk én meer producten aan het merk verbinden (variëteit) én als merk een specifieke betekenis handhaven (specificiteit):

- A Het vermogen om te variëren en specifiek te blijven wordt verbeterd als de kernconcepten van het merk bepaalde conceptuele kenmerken hebben. De twee eisen kunnen beter worden verzoend als de kernconcepten gebruikmaken van een metaforisch referentiekader dan als ze gebruikmaken van een kernmerkend referentiekader. Dat is helemaal het geval als het metaforisch referentiekader is verbonden met een extern fenomeen (zoals een evenement in het geval van Camel Trophy). Een dergelijk fenomeen versterkt de onafhankelijkheid van het domein waarbinnen de kernconcepten vallen. Dat maakt zijn metaforische werking in potentie krachtiger.
- B Een merkenbouwer is beter in staat om de variëteit te laten toenemen zonder dat dit ten koste gaat van verlies aan specificiteit als de inconsistenties binnen de conceptuele structuur minimaal zijn. Daarbij gaat het om inconsistenties tussen de kernconcepten en die tussen de kernconcepten en bepaalde subconcepten van de artikelen. Bovendien is gebleken dat beide soorten relaties invloed op elkaar kunnen uitoefenen. Zo hebben we bijvoorbeeld geconstateerd dat door het bestaan van inconsistenties tussen de kernconcepten, een bepaald kernconcept naar de achtergrond kan verschuiven. Als nieuwe artikelen vervolgens alleen worden verbonden met het kernconcept dat op de voorgrond werd geplaatst, kunnen sommige van deze nieuwe artikelen weer inconsistent worden met het kernconcept dat naar de achtergrond is gedrukt.

- C De twee ambities kunnen beter worden verzoend als de merkenbouwer bepaalde regulerende acties uitvoert, te weten:
- a regulering waarbij gebruik wordt gemaakt van de kernconcepten;
 - b regulering waarbij de kernconcepten kunnen worden veranderd;
 - c proactieve in plaats van reactieve regulering.

Uit het onderzoek blijkt dat met name proactieve regulering helpt om conceptuele problemen te voorkomen en zo het risico verkleint dat een toename van variëteit zal leiden tot een afname van specificiteit.

Zo beschouwd biedt ons onderzoek in een aantal opzichten een nieuwe kijk op een oud probleem. Er is in de wetenschappelijke wereld veel onderzoek gedaan naar de relatie tussen het merk en (nieuwe) producten. De meest omvangrijke groep van onderzoek is het zogenaamde 'extensie-onderzoek'. Dit type onderzoek biedt inzicht in de invloed van het verbinden van nieuwe producten aan een merk op de percepties en het gedrag van consumenten. In tegenstelling tot dit type onderzoek hebben wij ons juist gericht op de merkenbouwer. In onze opvatting is het van belang dat gekeken wordt naar hoe consumenten naar producten en merken kijken, maar dat dit voor een deel ook bepaald zal worden door hoe de merkenbouwer naar zijn eigen merk kijkt. Als deze niet bepaalde regels in acht neemt die te maken hebben met conceptuele consistentie – zoals die zichtbaar gemaakt kan worden door het onderzoeksinstrument – zal het hoogst onwaarschijnlijk zijn dat consumenten wel een eenduidige betekenis aan het merk kunnen toeschrijven.

Ons onderzoek gaat ook een stap verder dan de observatie van Broniarczyk en Alba (1994) die de nadruk hebben gelegd op het feit dat een sterke conceptuele verbinding door het merk het risico van specificiteitsverlies kan beperken. Het onderzoeksinstrument heeft ons niet alleen in staat gesteld die conceptuele verbinding te identificeren, maar we hebben ook kunnen beschrijven hoe die verbindingen werken door de relaties tussen subconcepten te identificeren. We hebben bovendien kunnen aantonen waarom sommige merken die verbindingen wel hebben en andere niet, door te onderzoeken wat voor soort referentiekader een kernconcept kan bieden en door de regulerende acties van de merkenbouwer te analyseren.

De laatste wetenschapper aan wie we ten slotte – wat betreft het empirisch onderzoek – schatplichtig zijn is J.N. Kapferer. Hij heeft als eerste het belang van de merkidentiteit aan de orde gesteld. In aanvulling op

zijn observaties stelde de conceptuele analyse binnen het onderzoeksinstrument ons in staat op een veel gedetailleerdere manier te kunnen beschrijven waarom en hoe die identiteit als concept kan worden versterkt of verzwakt. Daarnaast gaf het onderzoeksinstrument de mogelijkheid om te identificeren hoe merkenbouwers zelf met deficiënties in hun conceptuele structuur omgaan en welke vormen van reguleren daarvan de oorzaak waren. Het kan daarom tevens een bruikbaar middel zijn in handen van een merkenbouwer die beter begrip wil krijgen van de manier waarop hij naar zijn eigen merk kijkt.

Curriculum Vitae

R.R.R. (Roland) van der Vorst (23 – 01- 1969) studied Communication Studies and Business Administration at the Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen. After his studies he started a PhD project on brand management at that same university. After two years (1997), he joined the Strategy Department of FHV BBDO. In 2000 he became head of that department. As from September 2004, he combines this with a position as chairman of BBDO Nederland – a group of communication companies.

Roland van der Vorst is also vice-chairman of CMC, the joint venture of BvA (Association of Advertisers), VEA (Associations of Advertising Agencies) en het GvR (Society of Advertising).

